

# HOLINESS OF LIFE

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ST. BONAVENTURE



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Bonaventura, Saint, cardinal

# HOLINESS OF LIFE

BEING ST. BONAVENTURE'S TREATISE

*De Perfectione Vitæ ad Sorores*

ENGLISHED BY THE LATE

LAURENCE COSTELLO, O.F.M.

AND EDITED BY

Fr. WILFRID, O.F.M.



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# HOLINESS OF LIFE

## PREFACE

“Blessed is the man whom Thou shalt instruct, O Lord, and shalt teach out of Thy Law.”<sup>1</sup> I hold that only the man taught by the Holy Spirit and imbued with His blessed unction, is to be considered wise. The Prophet David lays down the same principle. He alone is really happy and wise whose mind the Lord has made learned in the Law. “The Law of God,” he notes elsewhere,<sup>2</sup> is the only law “without fault” and irreproachable. It monopolises the secret of “converting souls” to the way of salvation. To read the Law does not suffice. We discover its wealth of meaning and reap the fruits of its profound learn-

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xciii, 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. xviii, 8.

ing in devout and affectionate meditation. "In Spirit and in truth," <sup>3</sup> conscientiously, are we to seek this meaning. We must beg the Holy Spirit, with ardent longing, to give us these fruits. The Holy Ghost alone knows how to bring to light the sweetness hidden away under the rugged exterior of the words of the Law. To the Holy Ghost must we go for interior guidance.

The Law of the Lord teaches us the way to live, what is to be *done, avoided, believed, prayed for, longed for* and *feared*. It teaches how to live the blameless and spotless life, how to keep one's promises, and how to be sincerely contrite for one's failings. The Law of the Lord teaches contempt for earthly things, and a loathing for all things of the flesh. Finally, it explains how with whole heart, whole soul, and whole mind we are to be converted to Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> Compared with the doctrine of God's Law, worldly wisdom is vain and foolish. "As long as a man does not fear or love God,

<sup>3</sup> I Thess. i, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. xxii, 37.

no matter how great his reputation for wisdom may be," says St. Bernard, "I shall never consider him wise." <sup>5</sup> I would remind you that many forget what they hear. They are not numbered among the wise. The truly wise man *acts*, and does zealously what the Law prescribes. The *doer* is the wise and the happy man. "Blessed is the man whom Thou shalt instruct, O Lord, and shalt teach him out of Thy Law."

You asked me, Reverend Mother, dear to me and devoted to God, to outline from the poor treasures of my heart some little thing that for the time being would be a help to devotion and would bring some light to your soul. Really, it is I who need such help, particularly as my life is not a shining example to others. Inwardly, I am not burning with tender devotion. Further, I have scarcely the knowledge necessary to do what you ask. Nevertheless, out of regard for your repeatedly expressed wishes, and anxious to oblige you, I have done what you so earnestly prayed of me.

<sup>5</sup> Serm. 73 de Diversis.

Let me, however, beg of Your Beatitude,<sup>6</sup> dear most holy Mother, not to think so much of what I have written, as of my good and kind intentions. Please look for the truths of which I speak rather than for beauty of expression. Where I do not come up to your expectations, pardon me, and put my shortcomings down, please, to lack of time and stress of business.


<sup>6</sup> See Editor's Introduction.

## FOREWORD

By

THE MOST REV. JOHN MCINTYRE, ARCHBISHOP  
OF BIRMINGHAM

Although written primarily for women living in Religion, St. Bonaventure's treatise on *Holiness of Life* (De Perfectione Vitæ ad Sorores) will strongly appeal to every Catholic heart. Its value as a manual of spiritual reading, at once elevating, inspiring and practical, can hardly be over-estimated. It opens an easy way to a sound and profitable self-knowledge; it wins the soul to Christian humility, and to an unworldliness which is the secret of a contented and joyful heart; it teaches a method of contemplation on the Passion of Our Lord, full of devout attractiveness; it reveals the secret of fruitful and heartfelt prayer. In a word it treats of the great and permanent things in spiritual life and practice, and does this with



such living fervour that it sets our hearts on fire. There are no gloomy spaces darkened by the shadow of that Calvinism that was to come; no hard lines of rigour to remind us of Jansenism. Everywhere we find the cheerful seriousness of Catholicism, the reflection of the soul of a saint who lived in the bright and spacious days of that glorious and supremely Catholic century, the Thirteenth.

To those acquainted with the life of St. Bonaventure his very name will be a sufficient recommendation of the treatise now translated. John Gerson, the learned and pious Chancellor of the University of Paris, who has been reputed by many to be the author of the *Imitation of Christ*, set the highest value on the writings of St. Bonaventure. He regarded Bonaventure as the most perfect of the University teachers. He did not know if the University had ever produced his equal. He applied to him the words of Our Lord concerning St. John the Baptist, "He was a burning and a shining light." Therefore he compared him to Cherub and to Seraph—to Cherub, for the



brightness of his intellect, to Seraph, for the burning fire of his heart. He had not found any teaching more elevating and salutary than his. He admired him for keeping clear of curious and useless questions, and for being solid, safe and devout in all he said.

To the testimony of one who knew St. Bonaventure in his writings, it will be interesting to add the testimony of one who knew him also in life. This was Peter of Tarentaise. He was a Dominican, and had been professor in the University of Paris, where he won the title of Doctor Famosissimus. He became successively Archbishop of Lyons, Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, and Supreme Pontiff. He is beatified, and known as Blessed Innocent V. While yet Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, he had taken together with St. Bonaventure a prominent part in the Council of Lyons. St. Bonaventure died before the Council had concluded, and when Pope and Council attended the funeral service in the Franciscan Church in Lyons, Peter of Tarentaise preached the funeral sermon. His feeling towards Bonaventure is shown in his

choice of text; for he chose those tender and touching words with which David had lamented the death of his friend Jonathan. All who listened to his discourse would have approved the description of Bonaventure as one who was always gentle, affable, humble, pleasing to all, so that all who knew him held him in high esteem, and had great affection for him.

St. Bonaventure's writings reflect his character. Like the Saint, himself in life, they have a magnetic power which draws the heart to a desire of higher things. They conquer, not by force of eloquent language, but by the persuasive attractiveness of a calm and beautiful spirit. The transparent humility of a great soul puts to shame all the vanity of our littleness. His thought glows frequently with mystic splendour, which warms and inspires. The treatise on *Holiness of Life* is written in an easy and familiar style. It is like a friendly talk. The mysticism is subdued; and there is not wanting, as in the section on silence, an element of keen observation and humorous sarcasm. As we read the wise, friendly, and fer-



vent words we rejoice in an experience like that of the two disciples: "Was not our heart burning within us, whilst he spoke in the way, and opened to us the Scriptures?" (Lk. xxiv, 32)

We owe the translator and the editor a great debt for giving us in English this beautiful treatise. We wish it a wide circulation. No one will regret having been in the company of a saint who, in life, was gentle, affable, pleasing to all.



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

St. Bonaventure was born at Bagnorea in 1221. According to tradition he received the name of Bonaventure through the lucky chance that caused St. Francis to greet him with the words, "O buona ventura." Be that as it may, at the age of seventeen, some say twenty-two, he knocked at the door of a Franciscan friary and asked admittance. Haymon of Faversham, an Englishman, was General of the Order. He saw the aspirant, recognised his worth, and admitted him.

Our purpose will be answered though we skip the years. After profession, the Superiors of the Order sent Bonaventure to the University of Paris to continue his studies. Alexander of Hales, an Englishman and a Franciscan, was teaching theology there, and Paris was the better for his teaching. After a time Bonaventure

was appointed to teach. His accession to a chair in the University brought Paris greater fame still. His commentary on Peter Lombard's "Sentences" surpassed in wisdom and clearness all others which the Franciscan Order had produced. Scotus was not yet. Bonaventure's students idolised him. At the height of our Saint's career as university lecturer, the Dominican Order was represented at Paris by a man destined to be called the greatest light of Scholasticism, St. Thomas of Aquin. We make no comparison,—Bonaventure and Thomas were bosom friends. The friendship between the two showed up well in their united defence of the Mendicant Orders, when the latter became the object of general attack. Despite the wonderful lives and profound learning of the representatives of the Mendicants at the University, a certain William of St. Amour never lost an opportunity of hurling invectives at, and voicing a vicious and growing antagonism to, the Orders. He spoke against them and wrote against them. He summed up his hate in branding the Mendicants as danger-

ous to Christian society. Bonaventure wrote a defence entitled, "The Poverty of Jesus Christ," showing that the practice of poverty leads directly to Christian perfection. Quoting the Fathers in support of his teaching, he went on to crush objection after objection raised by the arch-enemy. While the same attack raged, he published in similar defence, "Replies to Different Questions raised concerning the Rule of the Friars Minor"; "Why the Friars Minor Preach and hear Confessions"; "Apology for the Friars Minor." The composition of the works which were to keep Bonaventure before the world as a profound philosopher, a safe theologian, a mystic, a contemplative, a Scripture scholar, and an exegete of repute, was for the time being suspended. All his efforts were focussed on the defence of the Mendicants. To conclude our account of the incident the Saints in arms won the day. When one reads the works of St. Bonaventure written in defence, one wonders how William of St. Amour's antipathy could have endured so long, and one marvels, too, at the ease with

which the authorities permitted the attack to continue.

Meanwhile the story of Bonaventure's abilities and activities was not lost on the members of the Order. A dispute raged among the Brethren about the interpretation of the Rule, and in particular about poverty. That dispute may go far to explain the lawlessness with which William of St. Amour attacked the Friars. At least two views of poverty found acceptance in the Order. John of Parma, as General, strove to keep the poverty of St. Francis as the heritage of his children. He was full of fervour and worked to keep to the fore the primitive conception of the Rule. He failed as General, if it is failure not to win over those who will see nothing good in a good man's works. During the reign of Pope Alexander IV, he bowed his head to the storm of opposition raised against him, resigned, and nominated Bonaventure in his stead.

It was a sad day for Bonaventure, as he had no ambition for first places, but it was a glorious day for the Order. Bonaventure proved

to have the intelligence and prudence of a ruler, the heart to be a brother and the humility to be a servant to those he governed. He became General in 1256, and continued uninterruptedly in office till 1274. During this long term of office he was elected Archbishop of York, an honour which he declined, and later he was called to the cardinalate and compelled by Apostolic authority and command to accept. Even though a cardinal, he continued in office as General. The generalship Bonaventure was only allowed to resign when the Church was deprived of the services of St. Thomas of Aquin, and he was burdened with all the duties of President of the Council of Lyons.

His work as General of the Franciscan Order has earned for St. Bonaventure the title of "Second Founder." In establishing and consolidating the Order on a sure basis, he left nothing to chance. First, he turned his attention on himself. In his book, "The Six Wings of the Seraphim"<sup>1</sup> he describes the model su-

<sup>1</sup> Translated into English by Fr. Sabinus Mollitor, O. F. M., under the title, "The Qualities of a Good Superior" (Herder).



perior. This description he personally realised. After he had shaped his manner of life to his ideal, he set about the task of inducing all the brethren to understand and recognise the spirit of the Order and its Founder. For this purpose he persuaded the Pope to issue a Bull revoking all privileges and permissions tending to lessen the efficacy of that spirit, and at the same time giving him, the General, such powers as would strengthen his authority in the matter of effectively insisting on the changes he might think necessary. Fortified with this Bull he set to work. That there were abuses he knew, but at the same time he had no misgivings as to the ultimate issue of his efforts. His letters show this clearly. He stated what he considered must be corrected, and he ordered how that correction was to be effected. He used grave words and was emphatic in his method of expression. He seems to have known the exact state of the Order from the beginning of his government. He was certain of himself, and sure, too, that in his work of reform he had a body of men who would be with him. He was not satis-



fied with writing, but visited the different friaries and provinces whenever possible.

He convoked five general chapters, of which the first was the most important. It was held at Narbonne, in 1260. The rulings obtained by Bonaventure at that chapter consolidated the Order and approved the reform. Addressing the friars in council, Bonaventure submitted his understanding of the Rule in the form of a commentary to each of the twelve chapters. He secured two effects: first, a love for the Rule, and secondly, a direct and perfect understanding of its meaning, an understanding compelling the impossibility of misunderstanding or of frittering away that meaning. This commentary, like the rest of his works, is enriched with a wealth of Scriptural quotation and comparison. After explaining his ideas on the Rule, Bonaventure proposed and enacted divers minor regulations or constitutions, touching particularly on poverty. Finally, with the concurrence of the Chapter, he delimited anew the territories of the different provinces, and before the Cap-

itular Fathers dispersed, promised to write the Legend or Life of St. Francis.

Bonaventure came at a time of exceptional difficulty. He overcame all difficulties, whether they arose through the actions of recalcitrant friars, or were the outcome of the fears of the more timorous among the Brethren. He induced pristine fervour, enabled the friars to practise primitive observance, and brought back to the Order as a body and to the members individually the spirit and ideas of St. Francis, without imposing fanatical readings or allowing lax interpretations.

Duties that came his way exercised his judgment, as, for instance, the question of John of Parma's relation to the book, "The Eternal Gospel." Other duties charmed his soul and brought him comfort. The loss of St. Antony was a blow, but all sorrow passed when, in translating the relics of the Saint, he found the tongue intact and incorrupt. One who was himself to be canonised was permitted to give utterance to a eulogy of a saint. His duties took him to Alverna, but he went as

a pilgrim and experienced all the sweet ravishments of a soul in love with Francis and God.

Preaching was no task to him. He was so full of learning, knew the Scriptures and the Fathers so well, had such an active imagination, power of conception, easy memory, and command of language, that he was always ready and happy to preach. There may be little doubt that Bonaventure was one of the greatest preachers of the time. This statement is confirmed by contemporary writers. No one preached so often and yet so well. He has left us sermons on the principal feasts and festivals of the year, sermons for various occasions, sermons on Our Lady, sermons on the Saints, and sermons on theological subjects. He was a master of conference. If we except St. Bernardine's works, scarcely anything has been written to compare with Bonaventure's conferences on the Holy Ghost. He is happy in his treatment of the art of preaching. It is consoling to find a saint willing to teach others how to preach. One could understand him hesitating and finding it diffi-

cult to say how sermons should be prepared and delivered. Yet, St. Bonaventure in a short dissertation lays down rules and is not afraid to exemplify his rules as he goes along.

The missions confided to the care of the Order were the object even of his dreams. It is said that he always envied the man to whom he granted permission to proceed on the mission. His pleasure was great when such permission was asked; nevertheless, his concern for the Rule and the mission was such that he required exceptional qualities and sure signs of vocation in the applicant. While Bonaventure ruled the Order, missionaries were dispatched to more than twenty-three infidel nations.

A man of restless activity, unbounded enthusiasm, and unflagging zeal, he found his happiness in work. The Popes employed him in the highest offices of trust. The confidence shown in him, added to the fact that in his hands and under his guidance God had renewed the pious infancy of the Order, made Bonaventure a happy man. Over and above he

had the happiness that is the reward of piety. He was good, he was virtuous, he was advanced in virtue. It is impossible to read his writings without being persuaded that Bonaventure was an adept in the workings of the mystical life and that he tasted of the sweets and delights of contemplation and union.

As General of the Franciscan Order he came in touch with the Poor Clares. The Poor Clares, or Poor Ladies, form the Second Order of St. Francis. St. Francis longed to save souls. When St. Clare came to him and explained her ideals and wishes, he received her as a child of God, and helped her to realise the spiritual and religious life. Posterity has written him down as the founder in God of the Poor Clares. Clare is considered as foundress, and the critic is certain that Cardinal Ugolini wrote the Rule. How much Francis had to do with forming St. Clare and what assistance he gave in the composition of the Rule matters little to us here. The Poor Clares grew up in the shadow of the birth-place of the Franciscan Order and under the



protection of St. Francis and the patronage of the Brethren. All the same St. Francis wished the relationship between the two Orders to be merely one of charity and kind direction. He wished no reciprocal obligation or right to exist. In the days of virulent opposition to the Mendicants, the Poor Clares were discussed in conjunction with the Friars, and the discussions were not always delicate. They could scarcely be so when no calumny was too vile to level at the Friars. Assertions, insinuations, and calumnies ultimately were reduced to the leading question: "Why do you burden yourselves with the charge of the Poor Clares?"

"The Order of Clares," Bonaventure answered, "is in no bondage to our Order, and neither is our Order in bondage to the Clares. The Clares may ask of us no duty that is of obligation on our part. Their Cardinal Protector has charged us from time to time with certain duties in their behalf, but so, too, the Brethren have been equally charged with similar duties towards religious women of other Orders. Our Rule, however, does not

compel us in the least tittle to the service of the Clares." Because there were sinister minds, under Bonaventure's guidance at the Chapter of Pisa, in 1263, all occasion for murmurings and accusations was removed. Once and for all the Friars decided, with the approval of Pope Urban IV, to give up all direction of the Clares. "Man proposes, and God disposes." It was ever so. The very next year, yielding to earnest entreaties, Bonaventure consented to allow his brethren to resume the direction of the Poor Clares, provided it was clearly understood that the services rendered were rendered purely out of charity and under the discharge of no obligation of justice.

For the Poor Clares Bonaventure wrote, "*De Perfectione Vitæ*." Rev. Father Laurence Costello, O. F. M., translated it into English a little before he died, in 1909. Having in view that St. Bonaventure proposed to outline the means of perfection, he called the work, "Holiness of Life." We have kept that title, though we have not felt compelled to adhere slavishly to the translation Fr. Costello

left behind him. Very Rev. Father George Payne, O. F. M. (Provincial), when putting the manuscript into our hands, asked us to edit it and prepare it for publication. We have done so and offer it now to the reading public.

“Holiness of Life” was addressed to a Poor Clare of Bonaventure’s acquaintance, probably Isabella, the sister of St. Louis, King of France. Following the advice and rules of life and conduct given to her in these pages, Isabella advanced in virtue and persevered. She has been raised to the altar, and under the title of “Blessed,” her memory is venerated and her feast kept on February 26.

“Holiness of Life” is a small work but contains much in a narrow compass. It exhales the author’s sweetness of soul. In it Bonaventure shows spiritual knowledge, knowledge of God, and knowledge of self. He discovers that he knows how to pray, how to love God, how to be poor and to imitate Christ’s poverty, and how to progress in virtue. It is difficult to say which chapter shows the most thought, though here and there we notice a certain un-



evenness. The chapter on the passion of Jesus Christ is full of seraphic charm. Thought and learning abound. The Minor Prophets he leaves out of count, but quotes all the other books of the Old Testament, and naturally illustrates them with quotations from the New Testament. He quotes both exactly and reminiscently, but never carelessly. The Fathers' choice sayings he frequently introduces to explain and embellish his own thoughts, and quotes in particular Saints Augustine and Bernard. Those who reading this little work come into direct touch with St. Bonaventure for the first time will love him for his love of the Sacred Heart. This is how he speaks of the Sacred Heart:

“Draw near with loving steps to Jesus wounded for you, to Jesus crowned with thorns, to Jesus nailed to the gibbet of the Cross. Gaze with the Blessed Apostle, St. Thomas, not merely on the print of the nails in Christ's hands; be not satisfied with putting your finger into the holes made by the nails in His hands; neither let it be sufficient

to put your hand into the wound in His side; but enter bodily by the door in His side and go straight up to *the very Heart of Jesus*. There, burning with love for Christ crucified, be transformed into Christ."

"Holiness of Life" outlines St. Bonaventure's conception of the inner life. We cannot say of it what must be said of the "Soliloquium," "The Triple Way," and the "Itinerarium," which together constitute a complete treatise on Mystical Theology, and prove that St. Bonaventure was a master of mystical science. "Holiness of Life" is but an outline. It outlines the way to perfection, offers the means of holiness, joins up the purely ascetical with the mystical, and is not above the comprehension of the ordinary intelligence. It is suitable reading for religious and laity.

Perhaps this is the best place to speak of St. Bonaventure's other works. His Commentary on the Book of Sentences of Peter Lombard, by reason of the part treating of the doctrine of the Incarnation, places Bonaventure well ahead of all other commentators. He

explains as one who had learned the secrets of the very heart of Jesus. This is not our personal estimate. It is the considered judgment of Pope Clement IV, Henry of Ghent, Saint Antonine, Gerson, and his learned editors. The "Breviloquium" is a complete course of theology,—a manual, if you like, but an incomparable manual. Besides being a complete and handy course of theology, it is a manual of prayer. The "Itinerarium" Bonaventure composed and wrote in moments of sublime contemplation on Mount Alverna. Although written in a three fold vein of philosophy, theology and mysticism, it is essentially a book of devotion, and is the fruit of Bonaventure's pious meditations. We have no space to discourse on his philosophic teaching. We say simply, that he is philosophical in all his works, and, for that matter, in all his actions. If the reader wishes to see philosophy pushed to the heights and to the depths, begging reason to prove, he must make a study of the "Itinerarium." When he knows the "Itinerarium" reason will have shown him all things in God.

Should he desire a book of theology that will lift him from an understanding of God and His works right up to God, and force him to long for contemplation and possession, he must carry as a vade-mecum the "Breviloquium."

"The Explanation of Theological Terms," the "Treatise on the Four Cardinal Virtues" the Quarrachi editors do not admit to be straight from the pen of St. Bonaventure; they allow, however, that these works may have been compiled from other of his writings. "The Mirror of the Soul" is one of the best of the smaller works doubtfully attributed to him. By means of an understanding of this book (its division is good, and the résumé with which it concludes perfect) any one may see himself in a mirror, so to speak, and discover if vice holds him in servitude.

The Middle Ages form the classical period of devotion to Our Blessed Lady. St. Francis' love for Mary requires no writing up, and neither does St. Bonaventure's. Devotion to Our Lady is a Franciscan tradition. St. Bonaventure instituted the "Angelus" as a Francis-

can practice. The rule of the Saturday Mass in honour of Our Lady, introduced by St. Francis, was confirmed by Bonaventure. Although the latter does not teach the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, his treatment of the matter "marked a distinct advance," writes Fr. Paschal Robinson, "and he did more perhaps than any one before Scotus to clear the ground for its correct presentation." In his works Bonaventure makes constant reference to Our Lady, and if we may judge by results, he kept Mary ever in mind when he was studying the Scriptures. Up and down his works he is for ever introducing symbolic Scriptural types of the Mother of God. As we have already noticed, he left behind him a host of sermons with Mary and Mary's prerogatives as subject. Before enumerating his Scripture studies and works we may note that St. Bonaventure founded at Rome a society or confraternity, possibly the first in honour of the Mother of God.

Fr. Paschal Robinson says of Bonaventure's exegetical writings that they "were highly es-



teemed in the Middle Ages and still remain a treasure house of thoughts and treatises." The Quarrachi editors accept as genuine his Commentaries on Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, the Gospels of SS. John and Luke, almost a hundred conferences on the Gospel of St. John, and a course of instructions on the first chapter of Genesis. "The Exposition of the Lord's Prayer" and the "Lamentations of Jeremias" they class as doubtful. By his profound understanding of Holy Writ, St. Bonaventure stamps himself and his teaching as coming from God. His knowledge of the writings of the Fathers proclaims him a painstaking student. We recognise him as a genius by his facile use of his acquired and (we must say it, he insinuated it in all humility to St. Thomas) his intuitive knowledge. Everywhere in his works there are signs that knowledge and understanding came to St. Bonaventure in devout prayer and contemplation.

His works on phases of the religious life we have already mentioned. With one or two exceptions they may be classed roughly as

works dealing with the mystical life. St. Bonaventure's reputation as a writer is not based on his explanation of mysticism. He is not professedly a mystic, though it would be wrong to say that he is not a mystic of the first rank. "The Triple Way" has been called "a perfect exposition of the best mysticism." The "Soliloquium" is a compilation of the ascetical teaching and the mysticism of the Fathers.

Our estimate of St. Bonaventure's works is not a critical estimate. We wished merely to give information and incidentally to draw attention to the dowry with which St. Bonaventure has enriched Catholic literature. We have wandered in the domains of that dowry possibly too long, and our wanderings have been thither and hither without much direction. If we have overlooked nothing of importance and have neither over-estimated nor negligently belittled St. Bonaventure's writings, we are satisfied. Except when lecturing at Paris, St. Bonaventure never could give much time to study and composition. From the day that he was elected General of the Order, to the

end, the duties of office were the first claim on his services. The multiplicity of his works under such circumstances speaks highly of his industry.

When Gregory X created Bonaventure Cardinal-Bishop of Albano, the Council of Lyons had already been convoked. The following year (1274) Bonaventure received papal instructions to report at Lyons. St. Thomas of Aquin was also called. Alas for Bonaventure and the Church, St. Thomas fell ill on the way and died. St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure, we have observed, were great friends, each professing an unbounded appreciation of the other. St. Thomas considered Bonaventure the greatest light in the learned firmament of his age. "Where," he asked him, "did you acquire so much knowledge? From which books did you learn?" For answer, and in no spirit of self-complacency, Bonaventure pointed to the crucifix. The story goes, too, that when Pope Urban IV decided to institute the feast of Corpus Christi, he commanded St. Thomas and St. Bonaventure to compose each an Office



in praise of the Mystery of the Body and Blood of Christ. The day came when the Saints presented their compositions to the Pope. St. Thomas read his aloud, and as he read, Bonaventure, overcome with the sublimity of thought and the beauty of imagery, coupled with the exactitude of religious truth and the dignity of expression, could not restrain his admiration. Persuaded that God's hand and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were in the words to which he listened, and that his own composition was, in comparison, weak and spiritless, he there and then, it is said, tore into shreds the work he had prepared.

At the earlier sessions of the Council of Lyons the Pope presided, but later on the direction of affairs fell to St. Bonaventure. Meanwhile Bonaventure held his last General Chapter of the Order and laid down the reins of government. Re-union was one of the main objects of the Council. When the Greek delegates arrived, empowered to sign an agreement of re-union and to swear fealty and loyalty to the See of Peter, Bonaventure was

instructed to open "conversations." The conference was successful. A formula of agreement was drawn up and signed, and the Greeks abjured the schism and made formal submission to the Pope. Success achieved, Bonaventure fell ill.

Despite the efforts of physicians Bonaventure continued ill. Prayers and masses were offered up at the urgent request of the Pope, but Bonaventure grew worse. As it became apparent to the Pope that Bonaventure was fast sinking, he administered the last Sacraments. Knowing that he was unable to swallow, the patient begged the Holy Father to place the Consecrated Host beside him, so that his eyes might rest upon the sacramental species. Then was witnessed a marvellous happening. The Sacred Host took to itself motion, and moving slowly, left the ciborium and came and rested on the breast of the Saint. A moment later it sank out of sight into the dying Bonaventure's breast. Nine days after falling ill he died.

The rest may be told in a few words. The

date of his death was July 15, 1274. Two hundred years later, April 14, 1482, he was canonised. Still one hundred years later Sixtus V declared him a Doctor of the Universal Church. Posterity calls St. Bonaventure the Seraphic Doctor, but let it be remembered that he was so called even in his own day. To look upon him, we are told, was to love him. To listen to him was to listen to words burning with love for God. His works inspire love for God. What wonder then that Pope Sixtus V gave his approbation and put his seal to the general encomiums, and with solemn decree ordered St. Bonaventure to be honoured for all time as the

SERAPHIC DOCTOR!



# HOLINESS OF LIFE

## CHAPTER I

### TRUE SELF-KNOWLEDGE

The spouse of Christ who longs to become perfect must begin with her own self. She must put aside, forget everything else, and enter into the secrecy of her own heart. When she has done this, let her sift narrowly all her weaknesses, habits, affections, actions and sins. She must weigh everything carefully, and make a thorough examination of past and present. Should she discover even the least imperfection, let her weep in the bitterness of her heart.

Negligence, passion, and malice are the root causes of sin.<sup>7</sup> When we realise, dear mother, that our sins and imperfections originate from

<sup>7</sup> Cf. S. Bonav., *Threefold Way*, i.

one or other of these three causes, we enter on the way to an exact understanding of ourselves; but unless in our recollection of past offences we put our finger on the precise cause of each sin, we shall never reach the goal of perfect self-knowledge.

Perfect self-knowledge, I feel sure, is the object you propose to yourself. You wish, helped by such knowledge, to bewail your past transgressions. Since this is so you cannot do better than proceed as follows. First, discover by reflection whether you are occasionally or habitually negligent. Recollect whether the control of your heart is slipshod and haphazard. Are you careless in the use of your time? Is the intention you propose to yourself habitually imperfect? Examine diligently on these three heads, because it is of the utmost importance that you govern your affections, that you spend your time profitably and always and in every action have a good and becoming object or end in view.

Recollect how negligent you have been in the discharge of your duties: prayer, reading,

and the like. Remember that the performance of these tasks and the cultivation of these practices demand your best energies if you are to produce and bring forth worthy fruit in due season.<sup>8</sup> It is of little avail to excel in one practice, if you fail in the others. Go on with the examination and recall to mind your neglect of penitential exercises, your negligent attitude towards temptation and sin, as also your general disregard for the means of perfection. To reach the Promised Land you must weep with grief at the thought of the sins you have committed. Further, you must resist temptations to evil, and you must "advance from virtue to virtue."<sup>9</sup> Take to heart these principles and you will be able to form a true estimate of your negligence.

Should you wish to pursue the subject and know yourself still better, take another look at yourself and ask whether your interior promptings tend towards pleasure, curiosity or vanity.

There is an evident weakness for pleasures

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Ps. i, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Ps. lxxxiii, 8.



of sense when a religious looks eagerly for what is sweet, for instance, savoury dishes. A similar weakness prevails when she is anxious for what is soft and comforting: fine clothing; or things gratifying to or soothing the flesh, as, for example, luxuries. You may know for a certainty that the handmaid of the Lord is a victim of inquisitiveness when she longs to fathom secrets, to gaze on pleasurable and beautiful objects, and to possess quaint and precious things. To seek the esteem and the good opinion of others, to look for the praise of men and to be anxious for the honors in their gift: the presence of any or all of these tendencies in a spouse of Christ shows a vain mind. O handmaid of Christ, shun these proclivities as poison, for they are the springs or founts of evil!

You will complete the examination and understand yourself thoroughly if you discover whether you nourish or have nourished within your breast the malice of anger, envy, or sloth. Please pay attention to what I have to say.

Anger or irascibility is surely nourished

in the heart when the thoughts, whisperings, spoken words, emotions, gestures or features of a religious are tinged with even the slightest coloring of animosity or indignation against another. Envy holds sway in a man when he feels joyful at another's misfortune or is sad when better things come his neighbour's way. The envious man rejoices at another's troubles and is cast down when all goes well with him. Sloth cannot be mistaken. It is sloth that inclines the religious to lukewarmness, drowsiness, unpunctuality, laziness, negligence, remissness, dissoluteness, want of devotion, sadness, or weariness. The spouse of God must have a holy horror of these things and avoid them as deadly poison. In them lurks the ruin of both soul and body.

O handmaid, beloved of God, if perfect self-knowledge is your aim, reflect! "Enter into your heart and learn to value yourself at your proper worth. Discuss with yourself what you are, what you were, what you ought to be, and what you can be. Note what you were originally, what you are now through your own

fault, what on the contrary good efforts ought to have made you, and what you still may be by correspondence with grace.”<sup>10</sup> “Listen, dear mother, to the Prophet David proposing himself as an example to you. ‘I meditated in the night with my own heart and I was exercised and I swept my spirit.’<sup>11</sup> He meditated with his heart. Do you the same. He swept his spirit. Sweep yours. Cultivate this field. Fix your eyes upon your own self. Without doubt, if you keep up this exercise you will find the hidden treasure of priceless worth.<sup>12</sup> A golden increase will come to you. More and more will your knowledge be widened and your wisdom strengthened. Be faithful to this exercise and the eye of your heart will be cleansed, the acumen of your mind developed, and your intelligence enlarged. If you do not know your own dignity and condition you cannot value anything at its proper worth. One

<sup>10</sup> S. Bernard, *The Inter. Dwelling*, xxxvi.

<sup>11</sup> Ps. lxxvi, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Matt. xiii, 44.

must first take thought upon one's own soul if the angelic and divine natures are to be correctly estimated and esteemed. If you are not able to reflect upon yourself, how will you be fitted to investigate the things above you? If you are not yet worthy to enter the first tabernacle, how will you have the effrontery to enter the Holy of Holies?" <sup>13</sup>

If you wish to be lifted up to the second and third heavens, <sup>14</sup> you must pass through the first, that is, you must pass through your own heart. How this is possible, and how it ought to be done, I have already explained. In addition, here is a piece of excellent and illuminating advice from St. Bernard:—"If you are earnestly desirous of uprightness and perfection examine continually and think well on your way of living. Notice how much you advance in virtue and how much you fall away. Examine into your conduct and the sentiments that inspire you. Look and see how like to

<sup>13</sup> Richard of St. Victor.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. II Cor. xii, 2.

God you are,—and how unlike! How near to God, and alas, how far away from Him!”<sup>15</sup>

Oh, how dangerous a thing it is for a religious to wish to know much and yet not to know himself! How near death and perdition is that religious who is keenly interested in getting to the bottom of things, or as a spiritual guide lives to solve the doubts and perplexities of distressed souls, yet does not know himself nor his own state!<sup>16</sup> O my God, whence comes such blindness in a religious? I will tell you. I have the reason at my finger-tips. A man whose mind is distraught in its anxieties for others has no memory for himself. His imagination is so clouded with pictures of other persons and things that he cannot form an idea of his own state. The allurements of unlawful passions so fascinate him that he never gets back to himself with a longing for interior sweetness and spiritual joy. Things of sense so possess his whole being, that he can no longer enter into himself, as the image

<sup>15</sup> S. Bernard, *Meditations*, Ch. v, 14.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. S. Bonav., *Soliloquium*, i, 2.

of God. Thus entirely wretched, not knowing himself, he knows nothing.<sup>17</sup>

Put everything else aside and learn well and bear in mind what you are. For such self-knowledge St. Bernard prayed: "God grant that I may know nothing if I do not know my own self."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Cf. S. Aug., de Ordine I, 3.

<sup>18</sup> S. Bernard, Serm. de Diversis, I.



## CHAPTER II

### TRUE HUMILITY

To see personal defects aright a man must feel himself "humbled under the mighty hand of God."<sup>19</sup> I admonish you, therefore, O handmaid of Christ, the moment you realise your failings to humble yourself in abject humility and acknowledge to yourself your utter worthlessness. "Humility," says St. Bernard, "is a virtue which prompts a man possessing an exact knowledge of himself to estimate himself and his powers as dross."<sup>20</sup> Our holy Father St. Francis possessed this virtue. He considered himself the meanest of men. From his entrance into religion even unto the end he loved and cherished humility. Humility compelled St. Francis to leave the world.

<sup>19</sup> I Pet. v, 6.

<sup>20</sup> S. Bern., Degrees of Humility, i, 2.

Humility drove him in beggar's garb through the streets of Assisi. Because he was humble he served the lepers. For the same reason, when preaching he made public his sins. His humility caused him to ask others to upbraid him for his faults.<sup>21</sup>

You ought to learn this virtue, dear mother, from the example of the Son of God. "Learn from me," He says, "because I am meek and humble of heart."<sup>22</sup> To excel in virtue and yet not to practise humility is simply to carry dust before the wind,"<sup>23</sup> says St. Gregory. As "pride is the beginning of all sin,"<sup>24</sup> so humility is the foundation of all virtue. Learn to be *really* humble and not, as the hypocrite, humble merely in appearance. Speaking of hypocrites Ecclesiasticus says: "There is one that humbleth himself wickedly and his interior is full of deceit."<sup>25</sup> "The truly humble man," says St. Bernard, "does not desire to be adver-

<sup>21</sup> S. Bonav., Life of St. Francis, Ch. ii.

<sup>22</sup> Matt. xi, 29.

<sup>23</sup> S. Greg., I Homil. on the Gospel, vii, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Eccl. x, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Eccl. xix, 23.

tised as a humble man, but wishes to be reputed and considered worthless.”<sup>26</sup> So, Reverend Mother, if you wish to be perfectly humble you must advance by three stages.

The first stage is thought upon God, as the Author of all good. We must say to ourselves, “O Lord, Thou hast wrought all our works in us.”<sup>27</sup> Because this is really so you must attribute every good work to Him and not to yourself. Bear in mind that “you in your own might and in the strength of your own hand”<sup>28</sup> have not attained to all the good things you possess. “It is the Lord who made us and not we ourselves.”<sup>29</sup> Such thoughts completely upset the pride of those who say: “Our mighty hand and not the Lord hath done all these things.”<sup>30</sup> It was pride such as this which caused Lucifer to be expelled from the glory of heaven. Lucifer would not realise that he was made from nothing, but taking de-

<sup>26</sup> S. Bernard, Sermons on the Canticle, xvi, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Is. xxvi, 12.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Deut. viii, 17.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Ps. xcix, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Deut. xxxii, 27.

light in his comeliness and beauty, and remarking how "every precious stone was his covering," <sup>31</sup> exalted himself in his pride. And because "pride goeth before a fall," <sup>32</sup> in the twinkling of an eye he was hurled headlong from his pride of place down to the lowest depths of abject misery. Thus the most exalted of angels became the most depraved of demons.

Oh, how many children of Lucifer there are to-day, men and women, apes of Lucifer! Sons and daughters of pride whom God in His patience endures! "Pride," says St. Bernard, "is less hateful in the rich than in the poor." <sup>33</sup> The handmaid of Christ, therefore, must always practise humility, since she is to fill the place vacated by a rejected angel. It matters little whether the creature be an angel or a man, humility alone renders the one and the other pleasing to God. If you are not humble, do not imagine for a moment that your virginity is pleasing to God. Mary would not have been

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Ezech. xxviii, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Prov. xxix, 23.

<sup>33</sup> S. Bernard, Sermon liv, 8.

made the Mother of God if she had been a proud woman. "I make bold to say," says St. Bernard, "that without humility not even Mary's virginity would have pleased God."<sup>34</sup> Humility is a great virtue. Without it not only is there no virtue, but that which might have been virtue is vitiated and turns to pride.

The second stage is the remembrance of Christ. You must remember that Christ was humiliated even to a most ignominious death.<sup>35</sup> So humiliated was He that He was reputed a leper. Hence Isaias said: "We have thought Him as it were, a leper, and as one struck by God."<sup>36</sup> Christ was humiliated to such an extent that in His day nothing was considered more vile than He. "In humiliation," continues the prophet, "His judgment was taken away."<sup>37</sup> The burden of the prophet's thought is: So great was His humility, and so lowly did He make Himself that no one could form a correct judgment of Him, no one could be-


<sup>34</sup> S. Bernard, Hom. I in S. Luke, i, 26.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Phil. ii, 8.

<sup>36</sup> Is. liii, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Is. liii, 8.

lieve that He was God. If then "Our Lord and Master" Himself said: "The servant is not greater than his Lord, the disciple is not above his master," <sup>38</sup> so you, if you are the handmaid of Christ and His disciple, must be lowly, prepared to be despised and humbled. What is more contemptible in God's eyes than the religious who with a humble garment covers a proud heart! Of what use is that Christian who sees His Lord humbled and despised, yet himself "exalts his heart and walks in great matters and in wonderful things above himself." <sup>39</sup> The Highest God became as the least of all, and the immense God became a little creature, yet a filthy worm, a mere handmaid of Christ, "exalts and magnifies herself." <sup>40</sup> What could be more detestable! What could be more deserving of punishment! Of such the Blessed St. Augustine exclaims in this way: "O ye bags of carrion, why do you swell yourselves out so? O ye putrid festers,



<sup>38</sup> John xiii, 16; Matt. x, 24.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Ps. cxxx, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Ps. ix, 18.



why are you puffed up? How dare the members of a body be proud when the Head is humble?" <sup>41</sup> A forceful way of emphasising the unseemliness of such behaviour.

The third stage by which you must advance if you would become really humble is by close acquaintanceship with your own self. You become acquainted with yourself when you realise "whence you have come and whither you are going." <sup>42</sup> Reflect then, whence you come and take it to heart that you are the slime of the earth. You have wallowed in sin, and are an exile from the happy kingdom of Heaven. Thoughts such as these will quell the spirit of pride and drive it away somewhat. Thoughts like these will persuade you to cry out with the three youths mentioned in the book of Daniel: "We are brought low in all the earth, this day for our sins." <sup>43</sup>

Take now the other point. Whither are you going? You are slowly making to-

<sup>41</sup> S. Aug., Serm. 304.

<sup>42</sup> S. Bern., Meditations i, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Dan. iii, 37.

wards corruption and elemental ashes. "Dust thou art and into dust shalt thou return." <sup>44</sup> "Why be proud, you who are but dust and ashes?" <sup>45</sup> To-day here, to-morrow gone! <sup>46</sup> In good health to-day, a mass of ailments to-morrow! Wise to-day, possibly an idiot to-morrow! Rich, and rich in virtue as you read these lines, to-morrow it may easily be said that you find yourself a miserable wretched beggar! Show me the Christian who will dare to extol himself when he realises that he is hemmed in on all sides by so many miseries and possible misfortunes!

Learn, consecrated virgins, to have a humble mind and to walk with a humble mien. Be humble in your tastes and ways and dress. It is humility, remember, that softens God's anger and renders us fit subjects for His holy grace. "The greater thou art," remarks Ecclesiasticus, "the more humble thyself in all things, and thou shalt find grace before God." <sup>47</sup> This

<sup>44</sup> Gen. iii, 19.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Ecclesiasticus x, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, x, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Ecclesiasticus iii, 20.

is how Mary found favour with God. Her own words are: "He hath regarded the humility of His handmaid." <sup>48</sup> There is no reason for surprise. Humility prepares the way for God's grace and frees the mind from all vanity. It is for this reason that St. Augustine says: "The less the pride, the more the love." <sup>49</sup> Just as the waters crowd into the valleys, so the graces of the Holy Spirit fill the humble. And to continue the comparison, the greater the incline, the quicker the water flows, so the more the heart bends under humility, the nearer we are to God. Thus it is easy for the man humble of heart to approach near to God and to beg His Grace. "The prayer of him that humbleth himself," Ecclesiasticus tells us, "shall pierce the clouds: and till it come nigh [to the Most High] he will not be comforted." <sup>50</sup> For "the Lord will do the will of them that fear Him, and He will hear their prayers." <sup>51</sup>

Dear children of God and handmaids of

<sup>48</sup> Luke i, 48

<sup>49</sup> S. Aug., *De Civit. Dei*, VIII. 12.

<sup>50</sup> Ecclesiasticus xxxv, 21.

<sup>51</sup> Ps. cxliv, 19.

Christ, be always humble. "Never allow pride to dominate your hearts."<sup>52</sup> You have in Jesus Christ, Our Lord, a humble Master. Your mistress, Our Blessed Lady, and Queen of us all, was humble. Be humble because St. Francis, your Father, was humble. Be humble because your Mother, St. Clare, was a model of humility. Be humble almost to excess, and let patience be the test of your humility, for humility is perfected by patience. Indeed there is no humility without patience. Listen to what St. Augustine says: "It is easy to place a veil over the head and to cover the eyes, to wear poor and wretched clothes, and to walk with the head cast down, but patience it is that proves a man to be really humble."<sup>53</sup> "In thy humiliation," says Ecclesiasticus, "keep patience."<sup>54</sup>

Alas, and I speak with sorrow, there are many of us who would lead proud lives in the cloister, yet we were lowly enough in the

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Tob. iv, 14.

<sup>53</sup> S. Aug., Epist., 17.

<sup>54</sup> Ecclesiasticus ii, 4.

world. St. Bernard realised this, and voiced his complaint: "It grieves me very much to see many who trod beneath their feet the pomps of the world, come into the school of humility the better to learn the ways of pride. Under the ægis of a mild and humble master they wax arrogant. They become more impatient in the cloister than they were in the world. What is still worse, very many will not suffer themselves to be held of little worth in the house of God, although in their own circle they could not have been anything but lowly, nay even contemptible." <sup>55</sup>

I recommend you, therefore, dear mother, to be solicitous for your daughters. Teach your daughters who have consecrated themselves to God, to guard their virginity by humility, and to keep themselves humble by the practice of their virginity. "Virginity associated with humility is like a precious stone in a gold setting," says St. Bernard. "What is there so beautiful as the union of virginity with humility! How indescribably pleasing

<sup>55</sup> S. Bern. Homil. iv, 10.

to God is the soul in which humility enhances virginity and virginity embellishes humility.”<sup>56</sup>

Lastly, dear mother, please take the following advice from me, your brother. It will please you. Avoid a proud sister as you would avoid a viper. Keep clear of the arrogant nun as though she were a devil. Look upon the companionship of the proud as something that is a virulent poison. Why? I will tell you why. A rather clever writer has left us the following pen picture of a proud man. “The proud man is unbearable. He is too loud in dress, pompous in his bearing, stiff-necked, unnaturally harsh of countenance, stern eyed, ever on the look out for the first places, wishful to outstrip his betters, boastful in everything, and devoid of all idea of respect and proper reverence.”<sup>57</sup>

“He that hath fellowship with the proud,” says Ecclesiasticus, “shall put on pride.”<sup>58</sup> O

<sup>56</sup> Homil. Missus est, i, 5.

<sup>57</sup> Prosper, Contemp. Life, viii, 1.

<sup>58</sup> Ecclesiasticus xiii, 1.



dear child of God, spouse of Christ, and virgin consecrated to the Lord, if you would avoid the risk of falling into the ways of the proud, shun the companionship of the proud.

## CHAPTER III

### PERFECT POVERTY

Poverty is another of the virtues necessary if we would be holy unto perfection. Our Lord bears witness to this in the Gospel of St. Matthew: "If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast and give to the poor."<sup>59</sup> Since the fulness of evangelical perfection is found in poverty, no one should imagine that he has scaled the summits of perfection if he has not become an adept in the practice of evangelical poverty. Hugh of St. Victor tells us that "no matter how many practices of perfection are found among religious, unless there is a love for poverty their life cannot be considered fully perfect."<sup>60</sup>

Two motives may be suggested capable of impelling not merely a religious, but even an

<sup>59</sup> Matt. xix, 21.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Expos. Reg. S. Aug., i Sq.

ordinary man to a love of poverty. The first is the irreproachable example of Our Divine Lord. The second is the priceless divine promise.

Let us take the first motive. The love and the example of Our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, ought to excite in you, His handmaid, a love of poverty. Christ was born poor, lived poor, and died poor. Realise and bear in mind that Christ gave you this wonderful example of poverty in order to induce you to become a friend of poverty. Our Lord Jesus Christ was so poor at birth that He had neither shelter, nor clothing, nor food. In lieu of a house He had to be content with a stable. A few wretched rags did duty for clothes. For food He had milk from the Virgin's breast. It was meditation on this poverty of Christ that roused the heart of St. Paul and caused him to exclaim: "You know the grace of Our Lord Jesus Christ, that being rich He became poor for our sakes, that through His poverty we might be rich."<sup>61</sup> St. Bernard,

<sup>61</sup> Cf. II Cor. viii, 9.

speaking of this same poverty says: "An eternal and copious abundance of riches existed in Heaven. Poverty, however, was not to be found there. It abounded and was superabundant on earth. Alas! man did not know its worth. The Son of God, though, loved poverty, and desired it, and came down from Heaven and took it as his own possession in order to make it precious in our eyes." <sup>62</sup>

All His life long, Jesus Christ Our Lord was an example of poverty. Let me tell you, O holy virgin, and all you who profess poverty, let me tell you, how poor the Son of God and King of Angels was whilst He lived in this world. He was so poor that oftentimes He did not know which way to turn for a lodging. Frequently, He and His Apostles were compelled to wander out of the city and sleep where they could. It is with reference to such a happening that St. Mark the Evangelist writes: "Having viewed all things round about, when now the eventide was come, He went out to Bethania with the twelve."

<sup>62</sup> S. Bern. Serm. for Christmas Eve I, 5.

These words <sup>63</sup> St. Bede explains as follows: "After looking all around and making enquiries as to whether any one was prepared to give Him hospitality—for He was so poor that no one looked upon Him with pleasure—He could not find a dwelling open to Him in the town." <sup>64</sup> In similar strain St. Matthew writes: "The foxes have holes and the birds of the air nests; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." <sup>65</sup>

Added to the poverty of His birth and life was the poverty of the death of the King of Angels. "All you" who have taken the vow of poverty, "stop and consider for a moment" <sup>66</sup> how poor the Lord of All was made for your sakes. Look at His poverty as He dies. His executioners stripped and robbed Him of everything He possessed. He was robbed of His clothes, I repeat it, when the executioners "divided His garments between

<sup>63</sup> Mark xi, 11.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. S. Bede, Vol. V. p. 125.

<sup>65</sup> Matt. viii, 20; cf. Expos. S. Bonav.

<sup>66</sup> Lament. i, 12.

them, and for His vesture cast lots.”<sup>67</sup> He was robbed of body and soul, when as He succumbed to His most bitter sufferings His soul was separated from His body in the pangs of death. His persecutors deprived and robbed Him of His divine glory when they refused “to glorify Him as God,”<sup>68</sup> and instead treated Him as a common criminal. “They have stripped me of my glory,”<sup>69</sup> complains Holy Job in a moment of prophecy. Drawing a lesson from the compelling example of Christ’s poverty, St. Bernard writes: “Think of the poor man Christ! There is no house for Him at His birth, so they lay Him in a manger, between an ox and an ass. Look at Him wrapped in wretched swaddling clothes! Think of Him a fugitive on the rough road to Egypt! Think of Him riding on an ass! Think of His poverty as He hangs on the cross.”<sup>70</sup>

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Matt. xxvii, 35; cf. Ps. xxi, 19.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Rom. i, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Job xix, 9.

<sup>70</sup> S. Bern. Serm. Easter III, 1.



After realising that the God of Gods, the Lord of the World, the King of Heaven, the only begotten Son of God has borne the burden of such dire poverty, where is the Christian, where the obstinate and benighted religious who still loves riches and despises poverty? "It is a great, a heinous crime that a vile and contemptible worm, for whom the God of Majesty and Lord of All became poor, should desire to be rich." So says St. Bernard, and he adds: "Let the godless pagan covet riches. Let the Jew who has received the promise of the land look for the fulfilment of the promise and for the possession of the land."<sup>71</sup> But the maiden consecrated to God, the maiden who lives among Christ's poor and whose profession is poverty, how can she look for the riches of earth? How, pray, can a daughter of the poor man of Assisi, a maiden who has promised to imitate the poverty of her holy Mother, St. Clare, search for earthly riches?

Beyond all measure of belief, dear Mother,

<sup>71</sup> S. Bern. Serm. All Saints I. 7.

are we in our avarice put to shame. Although professing poverty, we have bartered away poverty for avarice. Although the Son of God “became poor for our sakes,”<sup>72</sup> we are solicitous for what is not allowed us. We try to obtain what the Rule strictly forbids.

In commending perfect, evangelical poverty to you, let me insist on the following well-known fact: The more you are attached to the poverty you profess, and the more you practise evangelical poverty, the more will you abound in spiritual and temporal treasures. If you go the contrary way, if you set no value on the poverty you have made your own by profession, then of a certainty will you experience most constant spiritual and temporal need. That one time poor woman, Mary the Mother of the poverty-stricken Jesus, sang: “He hath filled the hungry with good things and the rich he hath sent empty away.”<sup>73</sup> The most holy Psalmist expressed the same thought: “The rich have wanted, and have suffered hunger:

<sup>72</sup> II Cor. viii, 9.

<sup>73</sup> Luke i, 53.

but they that seek the Lord shall not be deprived of any good.”<sup>74</sup> Did you never read, did you never hear what Christ the Lord said of poverty to His Apostles? It occurs in the Gospel of St. Matthew. “Be not solicitous, therefore, saying, what shall we eat, or, what shall we drink. Your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.”<sup>75</sup> Here is something else He said. It is from St. Luke. “When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, did you want anything? But they said: Nothing.”<sup>76</sup>

Living among hard-hearted unbelieving Jews, Christ did not find it difficult to attend to His disciples’ wants. Is it any wonder then, that He is able to supply the wants of the Friars Minor, and the Poor Ladies, who, living among a faithful and Christian people, profess and imitate a poverty akin to that of the Apostles? “Cast, therefore, all your care upon Him, for He hath care of you.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Ps. xxx, 11.

<sup>75</sup> Matt. vi, 31-32.

<sup>76</sup> Luke xxii, 35-36.

<sup>77</sup> I Pet. v, 7.

Since the fatherly care and solicitude of God for us is so intense, should not our anxious longing for temporal things cause us to marvel? Should it not astound us that we are eaten up with desire for vain and empty things? Why, when God occupies Himself with our welfare, do we trouble ourselves so about things of wealth and things of little concern? I can find no other explanation than that we have become avaricious. Avarice, avarice, the mother of confusion and damnation, has taken hold of us. We may assign no other reason than that we have turned away our affections from God, our Salvation.<sup>78</sup> The fire of Divine Love has become extinguished in us. We have cooled. Love for God has frozen within us. If we were really fervent and had really stripped ourselves of earthly things we should follow the poverty-stricken Christ.<sup>79</sup> Men when they become excessively hot are accustomed to strip themselves of their clothes. The proof of our want of love and of our

<sup>78</sup> Cf. Deut. xxxii, 15.

<sup>79</sup> S. Jer. Ep. cxxv, 20.

great coldness is the attraction which worldly goods possess for us.

O My God, how can we be so harsh with Christ! "He went forth from His own country," from Heaven, "from His own kinsfolk," the Angels, "from the house of His Father," <sup>80</sup> from His Father's bosom, and for us became poor, abject and despised! Yet we are unwilling to give up a wretched and noisome world. We leave the world in body, it is true, but in heart, and mind, and inclination we give ourselves up to and are wholly absorbed by the world.

O blessed servant of God, recall the poverty of Our Lord Jesus Christ, poor for our sake! Impress on your heart the poverty of your Father, the poor little man Francis. Meditate on the poverty of your holy Mother St. Clare. Cleave to poverty and practise it zealously and courageously. Embrace the Lady Poverty and pray God that for Our Lord's sake you may never wish to love anything else under heaven save poverty. Keep your heart free

<sup>80</sup> Gen. xii, 1.

from love of honours, temporal things, and riches. Strive diligently to live up to the holy poverty you have vowed. It is a waste of energy to possess and to love riches. To have one's heart set on riches and yet to be poor is a dangerous business. To be rich and yet not to love one's riches is too wearisome. The advantage, the security, the delight of life and the act of perfect virtue is neither to possess riches nor to have any fondness for riches. Therefore, Our Lord's example and counsel ought to prompt and excite every Christian to love poverty.

O blessed poverty, which makes those who love it beloved of God and secure even in this world! "For him who has nothing in the world on which his heart is set, there exists nothing of the world to fear."<sup>81</sup> So says St. Gregory. In the lives of the Fathers we read that there was a certain poor monk who owned a mat. At night he put half of it under him and the other half he used as a coverlet. Once when it was very cold, the superior of the mon-

<sup>81</sup> S. Greg. Moral. Book X, xxi, 39.



astery heard the poor monk praying: "I give thanks, O my God," he prayed, "because there are very many rich men in prison, many in irons, many in the stocks, but I like an emperor and lord may stretch my legs and go whither I wish."<sup>82</sup> There now, I have done with the first point, the *example* of poverty.

The second motive to inspire a love of poverty is the promise, the priceless promise of Christ. O good Jesus, "rich unto all,"<sup>83</sup> who can worthily realise, tell, or write of that marvellous heavenly glory which Thou hast promised to give to Thy poor? The practice of voluntary poverty earns the reward of the beatific vision,<sup>84</sup> and the right to enter into the palace of the Power of God.<sup>85</sup> Votaries of voluntary poverty merit a place in the eternal dwellings. They have a right to enter God's brilliantly illuminated mansions. They become citizens of the city built and fashioned by God. Thou, O my God, with Thy own Blessed

<sup>82</sup> Life of John the Almsg., xx.

<sup>83</sup> Rom. x, 19.

<sup>84</sup> S. Greg. Hom., II Book, xxxvii, 1.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Ps. lxx, 16.

Mouth hast promised them this eternal reward. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven." <sup>86</sup> The Kingdom of Heaven, O my Lord Jesus Christ, is nothing else than Thou, Thyself, Who art "the King of Kings and Lord of Lords." <sup>87</sup> As reward, as the price of their labour, as a complete and perfect joy, Thou wilt give to Thy voluntary poor even the possession of Thyself. They will rejoice in possessing Thee. They will find delight in Thee. They will, at last, find complete satiety in Thee. For "the poor shall eat and shall be filled; and they shall praise the Lord that seek Him; their hearts shall live for ever and ever." <sup>88</sup> Amen.

<sup>86</sup> Matt. v, 6.

<sup>87</sup> I Tim. vi, 15.

<sup>88</sup> Ps. xxi, 27.

## CHAPTER IV

### SILENCE

“In the multitude of words there shall not want sin.” <sup>89</sup> I quote from the Book of Proverbs. Obviously, a religious aiming to perfect his ways, will find silence a very helpful virtue. To speak seldom, and then but briefly, prevents sin. Where there is too much talk, God is in one way or another offended, and reputations suffer. On the other hand let only the virtue of silence come into its own and people get their due. If we deal fairly with one another, and practise the virtue of justice, we establish the bond of peace. This means that where silence is observed the fruits of peace are gathered as easily as fruit is gathered from a heavily laden tree.

Of all places in the world peace is essential in the cloister. Silence is of paramount im-

<sup>89</sup> Prov. x, 19.

portance in the life of a religious because by means of silence peace of mind and body is preserved. Dilating on the virtue of silence Isaias the prophet said: "The work of justice shall be peace, and the service of justice shall be quietness"<sup>90</sup> or silence. It is as though he said: The nature of silence is such that it acts as a preservative of the godly virtue justice. It encourages peaceful ways and enables men to live in peace and harmony. We may lay it down as a principle that unless a man diligently "sets a guard to his tongue,"<sup>91</sup> he must lose all the graces he has acquired and necessarily and quickly fall into evil ways.

"The tongue," wrote the Apostle St. James, "is indeed a little member and boasteth great things." It is "a fire, a world of iniquity."<sup>92</sup> According to the commentators, St. James' meaning is that almost all evil deeds are inspired or perpetrated by the tongue.

I shall now briefly enumerate for you, dear

<sup>90</sup> Is. xxxii, 17; cf. S. Greg. Moral. VII, xvii, 58; S. Bern. Epis. lxxxix, 2.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Ps. xxxviii, 24. Ps. cxl, 3.

<sup>92</sup> James iii, 5, 6.

sister, the sins into which we are liable to fall if we do not keep a strict guard over the tongue. A loose and glib tongue easily becomes the vehicle of blasphemy and murmuring. The tongue that wags will be guilty of perjury, lying and detraction. The sin of flattery is easy to it. So too, cursing, abusive language, quarrelsome words, and words which mockingly condemn virtue and entice to evil deeds. Scandalous gossip, vain boasting, the divulging of secrets, idle threats, rash promises, frequent and silly chattering and scurrilous conversation: all these sins come lightly, smoothly, and easily from an unguarded tongue.

To be unable "to hold her tongue" ought to make an ordinary woman blush. When the woman is a woman consecrated to God, a woman who knows the magnitude of the evils following on too easy a use of the tongue, then that woman's life is marred by a gross blemish. I have no hesitation in saying that it is all to no purpose for a religious to take pride in the virtue which characterizes her, if by too much talking she observes the rule of silence only in

the breach. "If any man think himself to be religious, not bridling his tongue but deceiving his own heart, this man's religion is vain." <sup>93</sup>

O amiable spouses of Jesus Christ, let us look up to Mary, Our Lady and Mother. All virtues are reflected in Mary. Helped by the Holy Gospels let us look upon her and learn how to keep silence. St. Luke records that Mary spoke seldom and with but few people. From him we learn that twice she spoke with the Angel,<sup>94</sup> twice with her Divine Son,<sup>95</sup> twice with her cousin St. Elisabeth,<sup>96</sup> and once to the waiters at the Marriage Feast.<sup>97</sup> Thought on Our Lady's spare use of words will do us good. It will cause us to blush. We are too talkative. With us it is talk, talk, talk, yet all the time silence is the great and useful thing.

Silence begets compunction of heart, and here is its first useful purpose. When a man

<sup>93</sup> James i, 26.

<sup>94</sup> Luke i, 34 & 38.

<sup>95</sup> Luke ii, 48; John ii, 3.

<sup>96</sup> Luke i, 40 & 46 sqq.

<sup>97</sup> John ii, 5.



is silent he falls to thinking and brooding over his manner of life.<sup>98</sup> This enables him quickly to see his many defects and the little progress he has made in the spiritual life, and soon compunction holds him captive. David tells us this: "I was dumb and was humbled and kept silence from good things: and my sorrow was renewed."<sup>99</sup>

Silence has another advantage. It shows that man belongs to a better world. If a man lives in Germany and yet does not speak German, we naturally conclude that he is not a German. So too, we rightly conclude that a man who does not give himself up to worldly conversation is not of the world, although he lives therein. The argument is conclusive. St. John the Evangelist, quoting St. John the Baptist, has told us: "He that is of the earth, of the earth he is, and of the earth he speaketh."<sup>100</sup>

The religious who would cultivate the habit

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Ps. cxviii, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Ps. xxxviii, 3.

<sup>100</sup> John iii, 31. Cf. S. Bern. Epis. lxxviii, 4.

of silence cannot do better than shun the company of his fellows and lead the life of a solitary. When he has lifted himself out of himself, God should be his only companion and comforter. A solitary and quiet life should be his aim. To have God as his companion should suffice. He should look for no comfort from, nor companionship with, men. "He shall sit solitary," avoiding the companionship of his fellows, "and shall hold his peace,"<sup>101</sup> and meditating on heavenly things lift himself above himself and revel in the sweetness of heavenly delights.

To be perfectly virtuous a religious must practise silence. Silence is essential to the spouses of Jesus Christ and to women consecrated to God. Religious women should be particularly sparing with their words. Their words should be "precious."<sup>102</sup> Talking should cause them to blush. They should never speak except in extreme necessity. St. Jerome may be quoted very aptly: "Let the

<sup>101</sup> Lament. iii, 28.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. I Kings iii, 1.

words of a virgin be few and seemly, and precious rather by their reticence than by their eloquence.”<sup>103</sup> One of the great philosophers of old taught in the same strain: “To be perfect I would counsel you to speak but little and only on rare occasions. When a rare occasion occurs, remember too, to speak scarcely above a whisper.”<sup>104</sup> O you talkative girls, you chatterboxes, you garrulous nuns, I have a story for you which, if you take it to heart, will teach you what you must do if you would learn to keep silence.

In the lives of the Fathers<sup>105</sup> it is related that a certain abbot, Agathon by name, kept a stone in his mouth to prevent his talking. For three years he continued the practice until at last he learned how to hold his tongue. Take this lesson to heart. Tie a stone to your tongue. Fasten your tongue to your palate. “Put thy fingers on thy mouth”<sup>106</sup> and learn to keep silent. Remember always that it ill be-

<sup>103</sup> S. Jer., Epis. i, 19.

<sup>104</sup> Seneca, Ep. xl.

<sup>105</sup> Migne Patr. V, Book iv, 7.

<sup>106</sup> Judges xviii, 19.

comes a woman vowed to Christ to look for conversation with any one except her Spouse Jesus Christ.

Talk, therefore, only on rare occasions, and let your conversations be short. Use but few words. Speak in fear and trembling and in all modesty. Above all “scarcely ever speak in your own cause,” <sup>107</sup> in your own defence. Cover your face with a veil of bashful modesty. Sew your lips together with the threads of rule and discipline. Let your words be few, for “in the multiplicity of words there shall not want sin.” <sup>108</sup> Let your conversation be useful, modest and humble. Never speak an idle word, because “every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the day of judgment.” <sup>109</sup> Speaking of idle words it may be noticed with St. Gregory that “an idle word is one that the speaker uses without necessity or with no advantage to the hearer.” <sup>110</sup>

<sup>107</sup> Cf. Ecclesiasticus xxxii, 10.

<sup>108</sup> Prov. x, 19.

<sup>109</sup> Matt. xii, 36.

<sup>110</sup> S. Greg., Moral., VII, xvii, 58.

It is always better and more useful to be silent than to speak. As witness of which truth let me quote a saying of Xenocrates, one of the philosophers of old: "I have often repented because I spoke, but never have I been sorry that I held my peace."<sup>111</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Val. Max. vii Dict. Fact. Memorab., 2.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PRACTICE OF PRAYER

The religious whose heart is cold and tepid leads a wretched and useless life ; nay, the tepid religious, the religious who does not pray fervently and assiduously, scarcely lives at all. His body lives, but in the sight of God it harbors a dead soul. It follows then, that prayerful habits are essential if the spouse of Christ is to achieve her desires and advance towards perfection. The practice of prayer is a virtue of such efficacy that of itself it can completely subdue all the cunning devices of its implacable enemy, the devil. It is the devil and the devil alone who prevents the servant of God from soaring above herself even unto the heavens. There is, then, no reason for surprise that the religious who is not devoted to the practice of constant prayer succumbs frequently to temptation.



St. Isidore realised this truth, for he says: "Prayer is the remedy when temptations to sin rage in the heart. Whenever you are tempted to sin, pray, and pray earnestly. Frequent prayer renders powerless the assaults of vice."<sup>112</sup> Our Lord gives similar advice in the Gospel: "Watch ye and pray that ye enter not into temptation."<sup>113</sup> Devout prayer is so powerful that it enables a man to win whatever he wants. Winter and summer, when times are stormy, when times are fair, night and day, Sunday and Monday, in days of health, in the hour of illness, in youth and old age, standing, sitting and walking, in choir and out of choir: in a word, never need the efficacy of prayer fail. Indeed, at times, more than the very world itself its worth may be gained by one hour of prayer. By one little devout prayer it is possible for a man to gain Heaven.

I shall now discuss the nature of prayer. Probably, in this matter I am more in need of

<sup>112</sup> S. Isid. III Sent. viii, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Matt. xxvi, 41.

information than you are, still in so far as the Lord inspires me, I shall tell you in what way and manner you should pray.

I would have you know, O worthy handmaid of God, that three conditions are requisite for perfect prayer. When you settle down to pray, close your senses to every sensation, and with your body and soul absolutely intent on what you are doing, ponder in silence with a sorrowful and contrite heart on all your past, present, and possible wretched efforts. Reflect seriously, in the first place, on the many grave sins you have committed from day to day. Call to mind how you have neglected so many opportunities for doing good—opportunities that came your way since your entrance into religion, opportunities that were given you before you took the veil. Think of the many and wonderful graces you have lost.<sup>114</sup> Once you were near to God. Realise how to-day, sin keeps you far from Him. Bring home to yourself the fact that you have become unlike to God. Yet there was a day when you were con-

<sup>114</sup> Cf. St. Bonaventure, *The Threefold Way*, II, 2,

formed to His very image and likeness. Your soul was once beautiful. To-day it is ugly and foul. Think on these facts.

Now turn your thoughts on what the future has in store for you. Whither will sin eventually "lead you"? "To the very gates of hell!" Remember that there is "a day of" dreadful "judgment." What is likely to befall? Do not forget "the eternal fires of hell."<sup>115</sup> How will your sins be punished?

Your reflection should move you to strike your breast with the humble publican.<sup>116</sup> "Groaning in heart you should cry out your sorrow"<sup>117</sup> with the Prophet David and in company with Mary Magdalen you should "wash the feet" of the Lord "with your tears."<sup>118</sup> There should be no end to your tears, for beyond all bounds have you offended your sweet Jesus by your sins.

St. Isidore gives similar advice. "When

<sup>115</sup> S. Bern. Medit.

<sup>116</sup> Luke xviii, 13.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Ps. xxxvii, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Luke vii, 38.

we pray to God, we should pray with groaning and weeping. This is possible if, when at prayer, we remember the sins we have committed, their exceptional gravity, and the awful torments we have deserved to suffer on account of our sins. Fear of those dread torments will enable us to pray with genuine sorrow.”<sup>119</sup>

In such wise should we commence our prayer. We should begin our prayer with tears that spring from sincere regret and earnest fear.

Thanksgiving is the second requisite. Blessings received from God should call forth the humble thanks of the spouse of Christ. So too, should she thank God in all humility for the benefits yet to accrue to her. In his epistle to the Colossians St. Paul lays stress on this part of prayer: “Be instant,” he says, “in prayer, watching in it with thanksgiving.”<sup>120</sup> Nothing makes a man so worthy of God’s gifts as the constant offering of thanks to God for

<sup>119</sup> III Sent. vii, 5.

<sup>120</sup> Col. iv, 2.

gifts received. Writing to Aurelius, St. Augustine touches on this matter. "What better thoughts," he asks, "can we have in our minds, what better sentiments in our hearts than those of thanksgiving to God? What better words are given us to utter or to write than 'Deo Gratias'? The idea of due thanksgiving could not be expressed in fewer words. What other words could give greater pleasure? No other two words are so full of meaning. What more profitable than their use?" <sup>121</sup>

You must meditate, you must pray with a grateful heart. Thank God because He made you. Thank Him because He raised you to the Christian state. Thank God because He has forgiven you so many sins. Thank Him because, had He not taken care of you, you would have fallen much lower. <sup>122</sup> Thanksgiving is due from you because God has taken you out of the world. Thanks to Him you will die in religion. You should thank God because He has chosen you to live the life of a

<sup>121</sup> S. Aug. Ep. xli.

<sup>122</sup> Cf. S. Bern. Serm. ii in 6 Sund. after Pent.

religious in the highest and most perfect religious state. You have no worry nor anxiety. He keeps you from harm, comforts you, and gives you all that you need.

Further motives for continual thanksgiving on your part arise from the fact that God took to Himself a human nature and became man for your sake. It was for you that He was circumcised and baptised. For you He lived His poor life. For you He went poorly clothed, was humbled and despised. All His fastings, hungers, thirst, labours, and fatigues He endured for your sake. For you He wept. Love for you prompted Him to give you His Most Holy Body to eat and His Most Precious Blood to drink. In anguish for you He bled from His very pores in the Garden. For you He was struck in the face, spat upon, befooled and scourged. For love of you He was fastened to the cross. He was wounded for your sake. He was done to death by the most cruel and agonizing crucifixion because of His love for you. It was because He so loved you that He paid such a price for your



redemption. He was buried, He rose from the dead, He ascended into Heaven, and He sent the Holy Spirit into the world simply because of His promise to give you and His chosen ones the Kingdom of Heaven. Such motives should be sufficient inducement to you to make your prayer an act of thanksgiving. Remember too, that while acts of gratitude render prayer immeasurably efficacious, all prayer is valueless without the element of thanksgiving. "Ingratitude," says St. Bernard, "is a parching wind which dries up the sources of piety, the dew of mercy, and the streams of grace."<sup>123</sup>

This brings me to the third requisite of perfect prayer. You must in the act of prayer occupy yourself with and think of naught else but what you are doing. It ill becomes a man to speak to God with his lips while in heart and mind he is far away from God. To pray half-heartedly, giving, say, half one's attention to what one is doing and the remaining half to some business matter or other, is no prayer at

<sup>123</sup> S. Bern. Serm. li on the Canticle of Cant.

all. Prayers made in such a way as this never reach the ear of God. In the 118th Psalm there occurs the following: "I cried with my whole heart, hear me, O Lord."<sup>124</sup> St. Augustine discovers in this passage the implication that "a heart divided obtains nothing."<sup>125</sup>

When at prayer, the servant of God should recollect herself and taking her heart to herself banish from it all solicitude for things of earth. Earthly desires should be put aside and all love of friends and kinsfolk forgotten. All her thoughts and affections should be turned inwards and she should give herself up wholly to the God to whom she prays. Your spouse, Our Divine Lord, Jesus Christ, gave this counsel in the Holy Gospel: "But thou, when thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber and, having shut the door, pray to thy Father in secret."<sup>126</sup> "To enter into your chamber" means to recall and gather into the very in-

<sup>124</sup> Ps. cxviii, 145.

<sup>125</sup> S. Aug., on same verse, Serm. xxix.

<sup>126</sup> Matt. vi, 6.

most recesses of your heart all your thoughts, all your desires, and all your affections. You have "shut the door" when you have your heart so well under control that no thought or wandering phantasy can thwart you in your devotions. St. Augustine's definition of prayer makes all this evident. "Prayer," he says, "is the raising or turning of the mind to God by means of loving and humble acts of affection." <sup>127</sup>

Let me exhort you, most good mother and handmaid of Jesus Christ, to "incline your ear to the words of my mouth." <sup>128</sup> Do not be misled. Do not be deceived in any way. Do not allow the sure and great fruits of prayer to slip from your grasp. Do not throw away and so destroy the sweets of prayer. Let not the delights you may drink to the full in prayer be drunk to no purpose. Prayer is the well whence sanctifying grace is drawn from the spring of the overflowing sweetness of the Most Blessed Trinity. The Holy Prophet

<sup>127</sup> S. Aug., *The Holy Spirit and the Soul*, 50.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Ps. xliv, ii; Ps. lxxvii, i.

David, who knew all about this, said: "I opened my mouth, and panted."<sup>129</sup> "David meant," says St. Augustine, "I opened my mouth in prayer, I begged by prayer. With reiterated prayers I knocked at the door of Heaven, and thirsting for the grace of God I panted and drew in that heavenly grace."<sup>130</sup>

I have already told you what prayer is, but I tell it to you again. "Prayer is the raising or turning of the mind to God." Pay attention to what I am about to say if you wish to learn how to raise or turn your mind to God. When you give yourself to prayer, you must recollect yourself and with your Beloved enter into your secret heart and there occupy yourself with Him alone. Forget everything else and with all your mind, heart, affections and desires, with all the devotion possible, lift yourself out of and above yourself.<sup>131</sup> Take care not to allow your mind to become remiss, but endeavour constantly, by the burning ardour

<sup>129</sup> Ps. cxviii, 131.

<sup>130</sup> S. Aug. on the same Psalm.

<sup>131</sup> Lament. iii, 28.

of devotion, to mount upwards till you enter "into the place of the wonderful tabernacle, even to the house of God." <sup>132</sup> There, when with the eye of your soul you have caught sight of your Beloved, you should in one way and another "taste that the Lord is sweet," <sup>133</sup> and learn how great is "the multitude of His sweetness." <sup>134</sup> You should rush to your Lover's embrace, and kiss Him with the lips of tenderest love. Then, indeed, will you be lifted out of yourself. You will be rapt even up to Heaven. You will be transformed wholly into Christ. At last, unable to restrain the raptures of your soul, you will exclaim with David: "My soul refused to be comforted. I remembered God and I was delighted." <sup>135</sup>

There are three ways in which the soul may be transported out of herself and elevated even unto God. In order then, dear mother, that you may learn how the heart may be lifted up higher and higher, and how prayer may in-

<sup>132</sup> Ps. xli, 5.

<sup>133</sup> Ps. xxxiii, 9.

<sup>134</sup> Ps. xxx, 20.

<sup>135</sup> Ps. lxxvi, 3, 4.

flame our love for God still more, I shall discuss these three methods. A surpassing intensity or excess of devotion is one. Deeply rooted, ever-increasing, admiring love is another. The third is exceeding great, exulting joy.

It happens at times that owing to excess of devotion "the soul cannot contain herself. She is lifted up, rapt out of herself and finally becomes transformed. When we are lit up by so great a fire of heavenly desire that everything of earth is changed into bitterness and becomes distasteful to us and at the same time the fires of the love of our inmost heart increase in intensity beyond measure, the soul melts as though she were wax. She in some way becomes dissolved, and like the fumes of fragrant incense she mounts high, until at length she gains her freedom away on the topmost summits of Heaven."<sup>136</sup> When this happens we are compelled to exclaim with the Prophet David: "My flesh and my heart hath fainted away. Thou art the God of my heart,

<sup>136</sup> Richard of St. Victor.



and the God that is my portion for ever.”<sup>137</sup>

Elevation of soul may also be brought about as follows: “An ever-increasing, admiring love frequently brings to the mind such floods of Divine Light and overwhelms the soul with such a realisation of the Divine Loveliness that she becomes bewildered. Struck to her very foundations she loses hold of the body. Just as the deeper a streak of lightning strikes the quicker it mounts, so is it with the soul in the condition just described. The more such a soul contemns herself and sinks in self-abasement in presence of God’s most admirable loveliness, so much the higher and quicker does she rise. The greater the ardour of her loving, admiring desires, the higher does she ascend. She is carried out of herself until she is elevated even to the topmost heights.”<sup>138</sup> There, as another Esther, she bursts forth into a pæan of praise. “I saw Thee, My Lord,” she exclaims, “as an Angel of God; and my heart was troubled for fear of Thy Majesty,

<sup>137</sup> Ps. lxxii, 26.

<sup>138</sup> Richard of St. Victor.

for Thou, My Lord, art very admirable; and Thy Face is full of graces.”<sup>139</sup>

A similar transport occurs when exceeding, exulting joy takes possession of the soul. “When the soul has drunk of an abundance of interior sweetness and is completely inebriated with delight she forgets altogether what she is, and what she was. There and then she is transformed. She is thrown into a state of supernatural love, and is rapt into a marvelous bliss-producing ecstasy.”<sup>140</sup> With the Psalmist in transport she sings: “How lovely are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts. My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord. My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.”<sup>141</sup>

Thus is it that the servant of God should train herself in the practice of fervent prayer. Frequent prayer, the frequent use of prayer will teach her and render her fit to contemplate things divine. The eye of a heart purified

<sup>139</sup> Esth. xv, 16, 17.

<sup>140</sup> Richard of St. Victor.

<sup>141</sup> Ps. lxxxiii, 23.

and washed by prayer can see the things above. Purified by frequent prayer the soul comes to taste and to enjoy the sweets of God. It is not becoming for a soul fashioned after and stamped with God's image to fritter away her time busying herself with earthly cares. A soul redeemed by Christ's Precious Blood and made for eternal happiness ought "to ascend even above the Cherubim and fly upon the wings of the wind," <sup>142</sup> that is, the wings of the Angels. She ought to ascend high and contemplate the Most Holy Trinity and Christ's Sacred Humanity. She should meditate on the glory of the citizens of the city above, and ponder on the happiness of the Angels and Saints.

Tell me, who explore to-day into the regions of heavenly glory? Who are they that in heart and soul pass their time thinking on the things above? They are the few. We may to-day with truth say even of many religious what St. Bernard said: "Many who should have been devoutly penetrating the

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Ps. xvii, 11.

heavens, viewing there the many mansions, holding converse with the apostles and the prophets and assisting in wonder at the triumphs of the martyrs, instead, find themselves as base slaves to the body, serve the flesh and pamper its gluttonous desires.”<sup>143</sup>

<sup>143</sup> S. Bern. Serm. xxxv on the Canticle of Cant., 3.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE REMEMBRANCE OF CHRIST'S PASSION

Christ's death on the Cross should live in our thoughts and imagination, for frequent thought on the Passion of Christ keeps aflame and brings to intense heat the fires of earnest piety. We must picture to the eyes of our heart Christ dying on the Cross if we would prevent the fires of devotion within us burning themselves out. An apposite quotation bears this out. "The fire on my altar shall always burn, and the priest shall feed it, putting wood on it every day."<sup>144</sup>

Let me explain, most devout mother. The altar of God is your heart. On the altar of your heart the fire of intense heat must burn constantly. You must feed the fire each day with the *wood* of the cross and the remembrance of the Passion of Christ. Isaias, the

<sup>144</sup> Levit. vi, 12.

## *Remembrance of Christ's Passion* 63

prophet, preaches a similar truth: "You shall draw waters with joy out of the Saviour's fountains."<sup>145</sup> In other words, if the grace of tears, the tears of thanksgiving, the tears of fervent piety are sought, such tears must be drawn from the Saviour's fountains, *i. e.*, from the five wounds of Jesus Christ.

Draw near, O handmaid, with loving steps to Jesus wounded for you, to Jesus crowned with thorns, to Jesus nailed to the gibbet of the Cross. Gaze with the Blessed Apostle St. Thomas, not merely on the print of the nails in Christ's hands; be not satisfied with putting your finger into the holes made by the nails in His hands; neither let it be sufficient to put your hand into the wound in His side;<sup>146</sup> but enter bodily by the door in His side and go straight up to the very Heart of Jesus. There, burning with love for Christ Crucified, be transformed into Christ. Fastened to the Cross by the nails of the fear of God, transfixed by the lance of the love of your inmost

<sup>145</sup> Is. xii, 3.

<sup>146</sup> John xx, 25, 27.



heart, pierced through and through by the sword of the tenderest compassion, seek for nothing else, wish for nothing else, look for consolation in nothing else except in dying with Christ on the Cross. Then, at last, will you cry out with Paul the Apostle: "With Christ I am nailed to the Cross. I live, now not I; but Christ liveth in me."<sup>147</sup>

When you meditate on the passion of Christ proceed as follows: Think how Christ's sufferings were the most disgraceful, the most bitter, the most general in kind, and the most protracted.

In the first place, O worthy handmaid of God, dwell on the fact that the death of Jesus Christ, your Spouse, was the most disgraceful possible. Most disgraceful, because he was crucified as a thief and a highway robber. The old Law<sup>148</sup> reserved the punishment of death by crucifixion for the villainous among thieves and the utterly criminal among robbers.

<sup>147</sup> Gal. ii, 19, 20.

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Num. xxv, 4; Deut. xxi, 22 sq.; II Kings xxi, 6-9; Esth. vii, 10 and ix, 13; also Gal. iii, 13.

## *Remembrance of Christ's Passion* 65

Reflect for a moment, and realise how Christ suffered greater disgrace than usually befell a criminal. He was crucified on Mount Calvary<sup>149</sup>—a place disgusting and vile because of its associations. It was a heap of dead men's bodies and bones, and was the spot given over to the execution of those condemned to death for murderous deeds. There only vile criminals were beheaded; only vile criminals were hanged or crucified.

A little more thought will enable you to realise still better the greater disgrace that was meted out to Christ. He was hanged as a robber among robbers. He was placed in the midst of robbers as the Chief, the Prince, the King of robbers. Hence we find Isaias saying: "He was reputed with the wicked."<sup>150</sup>

Consider even a little longer how greatly disgraced was your Spouse. As though He were unfit to live or die upon the earth, He was

<sup>149</sup> Matt. xxvii, 33; Mark xv, 22; Luke xxiii, 33; John xix, 17 and cf. S. Bonav. on Wisd. ii 19 etc., Com. on John xix, 17; Luke xxiii, 33.

<sup>150</sup> Is. liii, 12; cf. also Matt. xxvii. 38; Mark xv, 27; Luke xxii, 37; xxiii, 33; John xix, 18.

raised into the air and was hanged between heaven and earth. O worthy indignity! O fitting injury! The earth is refused to the Lord of the world. Nothing in the world is considered more vile than the Lord of the world. His condemnation was an insult. To crucify Him was still worse. "He was numbered and condemned among the wicked." To compel Him to die shoulder to shoulder with criminals increased His shame. Lastly they put Him to death on the vile hill of Calvary and thus intensified His shame beyond understanding. Christ suffered the very extremity of insult and unparalleled disgrace.

O good Jesus, O kind Saviour, not once but often were you outraged. When a man is repeatedly put to shame, his shame is thereby increased. Alas! they heaped insult upon insult on You! They bound thee, O Lord Jesus, with ropes in the Garden. In the house of Annas they slapped Thy face. They spat upon Thee when Thou wast in the hall of Caiphas. They made game and mockery of Thee in the presence of Herod. They forced

## *Remembrance of Christ's Passion* 67

Thee to carry the Cross along the road and on Golgotha they crucified Thee. Alas, alas, the Freedom of the Captives is enslaved, the Glory of the Angels is mocked, the Life of Men is done to death! O you wretched Jews, you said: "Let us condemn Him to a most shameful death."<sup>151</sup> What you said you would do, you have done, and done well!

Realizing it all St. Bernard cries out: " 'He emptied Himself taking the form of a servant.'<sup>152</sup> He was a Son and He became a servant, but for Him it was insufficient to be a mere servant and to live in subjection. He took to Himself the form of a wicked servant and thus made Himself an object for the scourge and fitted Himself to pay the penalties due to crimes He had never committed."<sup>153</sup> He was not merely the Servant of the servants of God, as is the Pope,<sup>154</sup> but He became the Servant even of the servants of the evil one, for did He not forgive and cleanse His execu-

<sup>151</sup> Wisd. ii, 20.

<sup>152</sup> Phil. ii, 7.

<sup>153</sup> S. Bern. Holy Week Serm. 10.

<sup>154</sup> John the Deacon, Life of S. Greg. the Great, I.

tioners from the guilt of the foul crimes they had committed? This did not suffice. Lest you should dread the prospect of suffering similarly, He chose a death more humiliating and more confusing than any other. "He humbled Himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the Cross."<sup>155</sup> What else could have reduced Him so to nothingness?

Come now, O virgin devoted to God, and consider attentively the bitter cruelty of Christ's sufferings. When harassed and wearied with pain a man ordinarily finds a certain ease and comfort in the contraction of his limbs and muscles. With His hands and legs extended on the cross, movement was impossible for Christ and so such relaxation was denied Him. Worn out with sufferings He found not even the least ease or lessening of pain. There was no place whereon He might rest His Divine adorable head as His soul was about to take her flight.

Let us go into the matter of Christ's bitter

<sup>155</sup> Phil. ii, 8.



sufferings more closely. The more tender a body, the more acutely does it suffer.<sup>156</sup> A woman's body is more tender than a man's. There was never flesh more adapted for suffering than the virginal flesh of Christ. It was born of a Virgin, who conceived of the Holy Ghost, and the Man Christ was the tenderest of virgins. It was possible for Christ to suffer the most excruciating sufferings of all. Actually, at the mere thought of the death that over-shadowed Him, "His soul became sad," and the sadness reverberating in His tender flesh, "the sweat" of his Body oozed out in thick drops "as a sweat of blood dripping to the ground."<sup>157</sup> What must have been the anguish and torture He endured during the course of His Passion! St. Bernard says: "O Jesus Christ, the blood which You sweated from Your sacred body, and which flowed to the ground as You prayed, most surely showed the anguish of Your heart."<sup>158</sup> "O sweetest

<sup>156</sup> Cf. S. Bonav. III Sent. d. xvi, 1, qu. 2.

<sup>157</sup> Matt. xxvi, 38; Luke xxii, 44.

<sup>158</sup> Serm. on the Life and Pass. of the Lord, 6.



Child," cried out St. Anselm, "what did You do that You should be treated so? O most Lovable of Youths, what was Your sin that Your judgment should be so severe? Alas, I am the cause of Your grief, I inflicted the deadly blow!" <sup>159</sup>

Once again, strain your attention and come to a better understanding of Christ's bitterly cruel death. When a person is innocent of a crime, the more innocent he is, the more poignantly does he feel the punishment inflicted. If Christ had endured the tortures of His passion because of His own sins, His sufferings would have been somewhat tolerable. But "He did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." <sup>160</sup> Pilate bore witness to this: "I find no cause of death in Him." <sup>161</sup> So too, the seventh chapter of the Book of Wisdom: He is "the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness." <sup>162</sup>

<sup>159</sup> S. Anselm, Prayer.

<sup>160</sup> I Pet. ii, 22.

<sup>161</sup> Cf. John xviii, 38.

<sup>162</sup> Wisd. vii, 26.

Consider still further how painful was the death of your beloved Spouse, Jesus Christ. Suffering is bad enough, but when every torture conceivable is inflicted, what could be more painful? Christ, your Spouse, suffered in every part of His body so that no member, not even the least, escaped its own particular suffering. No part of His body was too small or too trivial but that it had its full share of torture. "From the sole of His foot unto the crown of His head was no soundness in Him."<sup>163</sup> Hence, overwhelmed with the prophetic vision of Christ's too great sufferings, Jeremias puts the following words into the Saviour's mouth: "Oh, all ye who pass by the way, look and see if there be any sorrow like unto My sorrow."<sup>164</sup> In very deed, my Lord Jesus Christ, there was never grief like Your grief, no sorrow like Your sorrow, no suffering comparable with Your suffering. You shed Your blood so profusely that Your body was bathed in blood.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. Is. i, 6.

<sup>164</sup> Lament. i, 12.

O good Jesus, O sweetest Jesus! Not merely drops of blood, but rivers of blood flowed liberally from Your five wounds when Your body was hanging nailed to the cross! Blood flowed in torrents from Your head when you were crowned with thorns! Blood flowed from the whole of Your body whilst You were being scourged with the lash! Blood flowed from Your heart when You were pierced with the lance! If any blood remained in You it could have been only by a miracle! Tell me, oh, tell me, O sweet Lord, why did You shed so much blood? Why did you shed all the blood of Your body? One drop of Your sacred precious blood would have sufficed for the world's redemption. Why did you do it? I know, O Lord, why. It was simply and solely to show how much You love me.

“What return, then, shall I make to the Lord for all that He has done for me?” <sup>165</sup>

“Of a surety, my Lord, as long as I live I shall never forget how Thou spentest Thyself in my behalf. I shall bear constantly in mind

<sup>165</sup> Ps. cxv, 12.

Thy preaching, the weariness caused Thee by Thy travelling up and down the country, Thy vigils and prayers, Thy compassionate tears, Thy griefs, the insults that were heaped upon Thee, the spittle and the sneers, the blows, the nails and wounds. Otherwise, were I to forget these things, rightly would 'the blood of this Just Man,' 'which was shed upon the earth,' 'be demanded of me.' " <sup>166</sup> "Who therefore, will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to my eyes," <sup>167</sup> that day and night I may weep for the death of my Lord Jesus Christ? He suffered death not because of His own sins but because of mine. In the words of Isaias, "He was wounded for our iniquities, He was bruised for our sins." <sup>168</sup>

Lastly, ponder attentively and carefully on the protracted duration of Christ's sufferings and death. Christ bore about with Him His sufferings from the beginning to the end. From the first moment of His birth to the last

<sup>166</sup> S. Bern. Holy Week Serm. ii; cfr. Matt. xxii, 35.

<sup>167</sup> Jer. ix, 1.

<sup>168</sup> Is. liii, 5.

flicker of His life His death and passion were ever present to His mind. The Psalmist assures us of this fact: "I am poor, and in labours from My youth."<sup>169</sup> The same thought is expressed elsewhere: "I have been scourged all the day."<sup>170</sup> That is, I have been scourged during the whole of my life.

A further thought is suggested to reflection. The arrangements made for inflicting Christ's sufferings were peculiar to His passion. Everything was done to protract the torture. He was suspended in the air that consciousness should endure and thus would He be in pain to the end. Further, everything tended to keep Him alive, and thus the torture of a lingering death was His. Death by crucifixion kept Him conscious and in agony to the last moment.

From all that I have said, dear spouse of Christ and servant of God, you will gather a clear idea of Christ's sufferings and death. You will be able to realise somewhat how the

<sup>169</sup> Ps. lxxxvii, 16.

<sup>170</sup> Ps. lxxii, 14.

sacred passion induced in our Lord a sense of unutterable disgrace. His sufferings were cruelly painful, and extended to every member of His body and to every faculty of His soul. In a word, Christ's sufferings and death were unique in their kind and protracted in their duration.

Christ accepted these sufferings and death to gain your devoted love. Through thought on these sufferings and out of gratitude He wishes you to love Him. He desires you to love Him with your whole heart, with your whole mind, and with your whole soul.<sup>171</sup> To save a slave He became a slave. What could prove better His kindness of heart? What better incentive to enable us to work for our own salvation could He give than His own example? To appease the divine anger He accepted the death that the justice of God demanded and thereby gave us an example of obedience. Could you name a better inducement to love God than the love that the Son of God has shown for you? In spite of our

<sup>171</sup> Cf. Matt. xxii, 37.



worthlessness, though we deserve punishment, He “laid down His life” <sup>172</sup> for us. His kindness reached such depths and such heights that it is impossible to imagine anything more tender, more kind or more lovable. The greatness of His love becomes more patent the more the abject and terrible nature of Christ’s sufferings is realised. For God “spared not even His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; how hath He not also, with Him, given us all things?” <sup>173</sup> This is the way God has loved us, and has invited us to love Him and to imitate Him in His love for us.

Woe, therefore, to those who are ungrateful for the benefits accruing to them from this great kindness of Christ! Woe to those in whose souls the death of Christ produces no good effects! “Look,” says St. Bernard, “at Christ on the Cross! Look at Him, His head bent down as though He longed to stoop to kiss us! Look at Him, His arms extended to take us in a loving embrace! Look at His

<sup>172</sup> Cf. John x, 15.

<sup>173</sup> Rom. viii, 32.

hands so deeply pierced to pour out riches for our benefit. Look at His sacred side opened wide to permit the love of His heart to reach us! Look at Him, His whole body extended to give Himself entirely to us!" Woe to those, I say it a second time, who by their sins "crucify again to themselves the Son of God," and "have added to the grief of His wounds."<sup>174</sup> Woe, further, to those whose hearts will not soften nor give way to grief at the thought of Christ's sufferings. Woe to those whom the shedding of God's blood in such abundance and the payment of such a great price cannot warm and inflame to the practice of virtue, kind charity and good works! Certainly, such people are "the enemies of the cross of Christ."<sup>175</sup> On a day long since past, the Jews blasphemed Christ hanging on the Cross. Sinners do worse. They blaspheme Christ the Son of God sitting at the right hand of His Father in Heaven.

Speaking through the mouth of His servant

<sup>174</sup> Cf. Heb. vi, 6; Ps. lxviii, 27.

<sup>175</sup> Phil. iii, 18.

St. Bernard Our Lord complains of these ungrateful ones and rebukes them. "Man," He says, "look what I suffer for you. What grief is there such as I suffer? In the act of dying for you I appeal to you. Look at the sufferings heaped upon Me. Look at the nails which dig into My flesh. You can see the exterior suffering, but My interior grief of heart is greater still when I realise that in spite of all you remain so ungrateful." <sup>176</sup>

Take care, Mother, lest you be wanting in gratitude for such benefits. A great price has been paid for you. Have a care lest you be lacking in devotion or show too little attachment to Christ. Place Jesus Christ "as a seal on your heart." <sup>177</sup> Just as a seal is impressed upon soft wax, impress your spouse Jesus Christ on your heart. Say to Him with the Prophet: "My heart is become like melting wax." <sup>178</sup> Put Him "as a seal upon thy arm," so that you may never cease doing good and

<sup>176</sup> S. Bern. III Sent. d. 16.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Cant. viii, 6.

<sup>178</sup> Ps. xxi, 15.

may never tire working for the honour of the name of your Lord Jesus Christ. When you have done everything, when you have spent yourself in His service, begin afresh, as though you had never done anything for Him.

If ever anything sad befalls you, or anything grieves you, or if perchance something causes you weariness or bitterness of heart, or sweetness of soul turns insipid, lift up immediately your eyes to your Lord hanging nailed to the Cross. Look upon Him, His head crowned with thorns! Gaze upon the nails, the iron nails which fasten Him to the Cross, and upon the lance piercing His sacred side. In all trying moments, picture and contemplate the wounds in His hands and feet, figure to yourself the wounds in His most blessed head, the wound in His sacred side, the wounds of His whole body. Recall to mind that He was wounded for your sake, that he suffered for you and that His sufferings were so great because He loved you beyond compare. Believe me, a glance at such pictures and thought on such sufferings will quickly change your

sadness into joy. What was heavy to bear will become light. What causes your weariness will become something to love. The rugged and the difficult will be changed into sweetness and relish, so that soon, with Holy Job, you will begin to exclaim: "The things which before my soul would not touch," now when I look upon the "anguish" of Christ "are my meats."<sup>179</sup> It is as though you were to say: The good things which were distasteful to my soul are now become through the passion of Christ, which I realise, sweet and savoury.

In the Chronicles of the Franciscan Order<sup>180</sup> there is related the following story. A certain man being converted and having entered the Order eventually became impatient with the frugality of the Friars. The discipline of the Friary too, upset him. Once, being very perturbed and lost to all patience on account of these things, he threw himself down before a crucifix. With bitter tears he enumerated the intolerable hardships he was called upon to

<sup>179</sup> Job vi, 7.

<sup>180</sup> Chronicles xxiv, 3.

endure: the burdens of the religious life, the scant and frugal fare, the insipidity of the food and drink. As he poured forth his grievances, suddenly, blood began to ooze from the side of the image of Christ nailed to the cross. As he continued his weeping and wailing, the bleeding image of the crucified Christ spoke to him these words: "When you find your food or drink unsavoury, dip it into the sauce of the blood of Christ."



## CHAPTER VII

### THE PERFECT LOVE OF GOD

Earlier on, guided by the Holy Spirit, I explained to you how you should train your faculties so that passing from "virtue to virtue," <sup>181</sup> you might advance step by step in the way of holiness. I come now to the soul or life-giving principle of all the virtues. I refer to charity, the virtue alone capable of leading a man to real holiness. In mortifying the flesh, in overcoming sin and in attaining to grace, nothing avails like charity. Would you reach the highest rung of the ladder of perfection? Nothing could possibly be devised to help you more than charity.

In his book on the contemplative life Prosper writes: "Charity is the life of virtue and the death of vice." <sup>182</sup> "As wax melts before

<sup>181</sup> Ps. lxxxiii, 8.

<sup>182</sup> Prosper iii, 13.

the fire so" vices "vanish into nothingness" when they come "face to face" <sup>183</sup> with charity. Charity is a virtue of such power that it can both close the gates of hell and open wide the portals of eternal bliss. Charity provides the hope of salvation and alone renders us lovable in God's sight. It is so great a virtue that among the virtues it is called *the* virtue. To be founded and rooted in charity is to be wealthy and happy, for without charity we are indigent and wretched. <sup>184</sup> Commenting on the words of St. Paul, "If I have not charity," <sup>185</sup> Peter Lombard quoting St. Augustine says: "Just think a moment on the excellence of charity. Without charity it is useless to possess all else; possess *it*, and you have everything. To begin to possess it is to possess the Holy Ghost." <sup>186</sup> Elsewhere St. Augustine says: "If it is the practice of virtue which leads to Heaven, I unhesitatingly affirm that

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Ps. lxxvii, 3.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. Apoc. iii, 17.

<sup>185</sup> I Cor. xiii, 2.

<sup>186</sup> Pet. Lomb. Com. on I Cor., quoting S. Aug.

the virtue to be practised is the pure love of God.”<sup>187</sup>

Since it is a virtue of supreme importance charity must be insisted on before all else. Let it be well noted, however, that the charity leading to the possession of God is not any charity, but solely the charity, the love that loves God above all things and loves God's creatures for God's sake.

The Holy Gospel gives a clear lead on the qualities of this love for God. “Thou shalt love the Lord Thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind.”<sup>188</sup> Think well, most cherished handmaid of Jesus Christ, on the love which Your Beloved Jesus demands from you. He, Your Best Beloved, wishes you to love, and to love Him most lovingly. He desires that you give yourself body and soul, mind and heart entirely to love of Him. He wishes to share your love with no one else. He commands that you be all His. How is this to be done? What are

<sup>187</sup> S. Aug. De Morib. Ecc., I, xv, 25.

<sup>188</sup> Matt. xxii, 37; Mark xii, 30; Luke x, 27.

you to do that there can be no doubt that you love the Lord God with your whole heart? How is the love of the whole heart given? For answer, let me quote St. John Chrysostom: "To love God with your whole heart it is requisite that nothing attract your heart more than God attracts it. You must not take more pleasure in the things of earth than in God. Honours and places of position, love of father and mother and relatives must not count in the scale of love before love of God. Be it friend or relative, place or position, be it what it may, if anything takes up your heart's love more than God, you do not love God with your whole heart." <sup>189</sup>

I beg you, dear handmaid of Christ, not to deceive yourself in your love. If you love anything which is not in God, or if loving you do not love for God's sake, you do not yet love God with your whole heart. It is on this account that St. Augustine writes: "O Lord, whoever divides his love with You and anything or any one else, gives You less love

<sup>189</sup> S. Chrys., Hom. on Matt.

than is Your due.”<sup>190</sup> If your love for anything does not conduce to greater love for God you do not yet love Him with your whole heart. If for the love of anything dear to you, you neglect to give Christ those things that are His by right, again, I say, you do not love Him with your whole heart.

We must love Our Lord Jesus Christ not only with all our heart, but also with all our soul. The same Blessed St. Augustine explains how this is to be done. “To love God with one’s whole soul, is so to centre the will on loving Him that nothing in any way opposed to Him wins the least of our love. For the soul to give in its entirety all the love of which its faculties are capable, she must willingly, without the least reluctance or reserve, give her love in full accord with all Her Lord’s desires.”<sup>191</sup> To love Him because it pleases you to give him your love or because the world recommends, or the flesh suggests such love, is not the love God asks. If for the love of

<sup>190</sup> S. Aug. Conf. xxix, 40.

<sup>191</sup> S. Aug. Serm. cviii, 35.

Jesus Christ you would be prepared gallantly and lovingly to die in His service, should occasion arise, then most certainly do you love Him with your whole soul. If you do not love Him for His own sake or would find it difficult to die for His sake, your love is imperfect. It is not the love of your whole soul that you offer Him. Conform your will in all things to the Divine Will. This is what God demands. Do this, and the love wherewith you love God will be the love of your whole soul.

Not only must you love your Spouse, Jesus Christ, with your whole heart and soul, you must also love Him with all your mind. What "with all your mind" means St. Augustine explains: "To love God with all the love of which the mind is capable is to love Him unceasingly. It means that He must never be absent from our loving thoughts. Memory must keep Him constantly in mind."<sup>192</sup>

<sup>192</sup> S. Aug. Serm. cviii.



## CHAPTER VIII

### FINAL PERSEVERANCE

It is not enough to be virtuous. To be firmly rooted in virtue, to possess virtuous habits, does not render us glorious in God's sight. Something else is still wanting. To be an object of glory to the eye of God we must possess the culminating virtue, the crown and consummation of all virtues, perseverance. No mortal being whatever, no matter how perfect He may seem, should be praised whilst he lives. Let a man be praised not because he has begun a good work but because he has brought it to a good and happy completion. "Perseverance is the end, acme and crown of the virtues, it nurtures and fits one for merit, it leads to and culminates in reward."<sup>193</sup> Hence St. Bernard says: "Take away perseverance and nothing remains. For the ful-

<sup>193</sup> S. Bern. Ep. cxxix, 2.

filment of duty, the performance of good deeds and the exercise of fortitude will not procure the grace sufficient to obtain eternal praise.”<sup>194</sup> It will avail a man little to have been a religious, to have been patient and humble, devout and chaste, to have loved God and to have exercised himself in all the virtues, if he continues not to the end. He must persevere to win the crown. In the race of the spiritual life all the virtues run, but only perseverance “receives the prize.”<sup>195</sup> It is not the beginner in virtue but “he that shall persevere unto the end, he shall be saved.”<sup>196</sup> “What is the use of seeds sprouting if afterwards they wither and die?”<sup>197</sup> asks St. Chrysostom. None whatever!

If then, dear spouse of Jesus Christ, your virtues are productive of good works—and I assume that this is so—be sure to continue in your good practices. Persevere in your vir-

<sup>194</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>195</sup> I Cor. ix, 24.

<sup>196</sup> Matt. x, 22.

<sup>197</sup> S. Chrys., Hom. xxxiii, 5.

tuous habits. Make it a practice ever and constantly to increase in the performance of good works. Wage the war of Christ with all your might. Practise and increase in virtue up to the very moment of death. Then, when your last moment comes and your life is brought to a close, God will give you the crown of honour and glory as the prize and reward of your labour. Your best Beloved Lord Jesus Christ has assured you of this. These are His words, written for your instruction by the inspired writer of the Apocalypse: "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life."<sup>198</sup> What is this crown if not the reward of eternal life? The heart of every Christian ought to burn with the desire of winning this reward. In value there is nothing comparable to it, it is priceless. It surpasses the mathematician's power, says St. Gregory, to count its varying parts and manifold possibilities.<sup>199</sup> There is no limit to its

<sup>198</sup> Apoc. ii, 10.

<sup>199</sup> Cf .S. Greg. II Hom. on Gospels xxxvii, 1.

duration. It is to be enjoyed eternally. It can never cease.

Your Beloved Spouse Jesus Christ invites you to win this prize, to gain this crown. Listen to what He says to you in the Cantic of Canticles: "Come from Libanus, my Spouse, come my friend from Libanus, come and thou shalt be crowned."<sup>200</sup> "Arise at once," you who call yourself "the friend" of God, the spouse of Jesus Christ, the best beloved of the Eternal King, "come, make haste"<sup>201</sup> to the marriage feast of the Son of God.<sup>202</sup> "Everything is prepared,"<sup>203</sup> the whole court of Heaven awaits you.<sup>204</sup>

Three wonderful joys are prepared for you in the heavenly Kingdom. There is a servant of noble lineage, beautiful to look upon. He will be at your beck and call. A food of priceless worth and alluring in its sweetness to re-

<sup>200</sup> Cant. iv, 8.

<sup>201</sup> Cant. ii, 10.

<sup>202</sup> Cf. Apoc. xix, 9.

<sup>203</sup> Matt. xxii, 4.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. S. Bonav. Soliloq.

fresh you. A society, sweet and delightful and lovable beyond conception. Such fellowship will intensify your joy. Arise then and speed with haste to the nuptials, because of the transcendent beauty of the servant who waits to perform your commands. That servant is not one only, for the whole angelic assembly, yea, even the very Son of God will be in readiness to attend to your wants. Listen to what He says of Himself as reported in the Holy Gospel of St. Luke: "Amen, I say to you, that He will gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and passing, will minister unto them."<sup>205</sup> Ah, then, indeed, great will be the glory of the poor and lowly, to have the Son of God, the Eternal King ministering to their wants and the whole court of Heaven diligently obeying their behests.

A precious, delight-giving food, a food to refresh you, awaits you there. The very Son of God with His own hands will prepare the table. He pledged His word to this, as we read in St. Luke: "I dispose to you, as my

<sup>205</sup> Luke xii, 37; cf. S. Bonav. Soliloq. iv, 12.

Father has disposed to me a Kingdom; that you may eat and drink at my table, in my Kingdom.”<sup>206</sup> Oh, how sweet and luscious is that food which God in all His sweetness has prepared for the poor!<sup>207</sup> Oh, how blessed will he be who eats that food in the Kingdom of Heaven! In the precincts of the Virginal Womb of Mary that food was prepared by the burning love of the Holy Ghost. “If any man eat of this Bread he shall live forever.”<sup>208</sup> With such food, with such bread the King of Heaven feeds and refreshes His chosen ones. This we are told also in the Book of Wisdom. “Thou didst feed Thy people with the food of Angels and gavest them bread from Heaven, prepared without labour, having in it all that is delicious and the sweetness of every taste, —and serving every man’s will.”<sup>209</sup> Such, in a word, is the repast provided at the heavenly table.

<sup>206</sup> Luke xxii, 29 & 30.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. Ps. lxxvii, 11.

<sup>208</sup> John vi, 52.

<sup>209</sup> Wisd. xvi, 20, 21.



There is also a loving and exceedingly lovable fellowship prepared that your happiness in Heaven may be complete. There the company will be the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit together with Mary and her throng of chaste virgins. There you will dwell with the Apostles, the Martyrs, the Confessors, the whole army of the elect. How altogether miserable it will be for those who fail to be associated with this most noble band! If there is one who does not long to have part in this fellowship, all desire in him must be dead.

You, O most noble handmaid of Christ, I know, desire Christ. You are striving to gain possession of Christ and you are striving with all your might. Your great desire is to languish in the companionship and embraces of the Eternal King. "Well, now, have courage, inflame your heart, arouse your soul, keep your intellect on the alert and think well on what you are able to do. If each good thing separately may furnish delight, reflect how replete with delight must be the good that contains all the delight which all good things can

produce collectively. If the life of the creature is good, what goodness must there be in the Creator of life? If the health of the body is an inestimable delight, what is to be said of that Health, that saving Power which is the Author of all health and salvation, whether of soul or body? When one possesses this great Good there is no limit to one's possessions. There is nothing that does not belong to him. Whatever he desires will be his. Whatever he does not want he will not have. In Heaven, undoubtedly, will be found the good things of soul and body—good things such as 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, and that have neither entered into the heart of man.' Why then do you wander about so much searching for good things for soul and body? Love the One Only Good. Love the Good in which all other good is contained. That One Good suffices. Long for that Goodness alone which is all that is Good. It is all that you need." <sup>210</sup>

"In Heaven, Mother dear, all that you love, all that you desire is to be found. What is

<sup>210</sup> S. Anselm, *Proslog.* xxiv & xxvi; I Cor. ii, 9.

it you love? O loving virgin, on what do you centre all the desires of your heart? Is it beauty which charms you and claims your love? If so, 'In Heaven the just shall shine as the sun.'<sup>211</sup> If a long life, a life full of health is what you mostly wish, in Heaven you will realise your desire, for there the just shall live for ever. 'The salvation of the just is for evermore.'<sup>212</sup> Is it a complete, a total satisfaction that you crave? If so 'there they will be satisfied when the glory of God shall appear.'<sup>213</sup> Would you be inebriated, intoxicated with delight? 'They shall be inebriated with the plenty of the house of God.'<sup>214</sup> Do you look to be delighted with sweet melody? Well, in Heaven the Angelic Choirs chant in harmony praising God without ceasing. Is it in loving friendship you seek your delight? In Heaven the Saints love God more than themselves. So, too, they love each other more

<sup>211</sup> Matt. xiii, 43.

<sup>212</sup> Wisd. v, 16; Ps. xxxvi, 39.

<sup>213</sup> Cf. Ps. xvi, 15.

<sup>214</sup> Cf. Ps. xxxv, 9.

than themselves and God loves them infinitely more than they love themselves. Should it be peace of heart and union which appeals to you, realise that in Heaven there is no will but the Will of God. If honour and riches please you, God 'will place' His servants and his handmaids 'over many things.' <sup>215</sup> 'They shall be called' and will be indeed, the sons and daughters, 'the children of God.' <sup>216</sup> Where God is there they also shall be who are 'the heirs' indeed of God, 'and co-heirs with Christ.' " <sup>217</sup>

"Where goodness to such a degree and to such an excess exists, what will be the qualities and extent of the joy there to be found? Certainly, O Lord Jesus, 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither,' in this life 'hath it entered into the heart of man' <sup>218</sup> to conceive how Thy Blessed will love Thee and will rejoice on Thy account when they revel in heavenly bliss." <sup>219</sup>

<sup>215</sup> Matt. xxv, 21.

<sup>216</sup> Matt. v, 9.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. John xii, 26 and Rom. viii, 17; S. Anselm, Prosloq. xxv.

<sup>218</sup> I Cor. ii, 9.

<sup>219</sup> S. Anselm, Prosloq. xxvi.

What measure men put to their love of God here will be the measure of their rejoicing with God in Heaven. Therefore, love God intensely here, and your rejoicing will be intense hereafter. Continue to grow in the love of God here, and afterwards in Heaven you will possess the fulness of eternal joy. "Ponder in mind on the joy of Heaven, talk it over with yourself, love it with all your heart and speak of it to others. Let your soul hunger and your body thirst for it. Long for it with all your being until at last you 'enter into the joy of your Lord.'"<sup>220</sup> Sigh for it until you fall into the loving embraces of your Spouse and are introduced by Him into His own bridal chamber, where with the Father and the Holy Spirit He lives and reigns One God, for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>220</sup> S. Anselm, *ibid.*, and Matt. xxv. 21.

THE END

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